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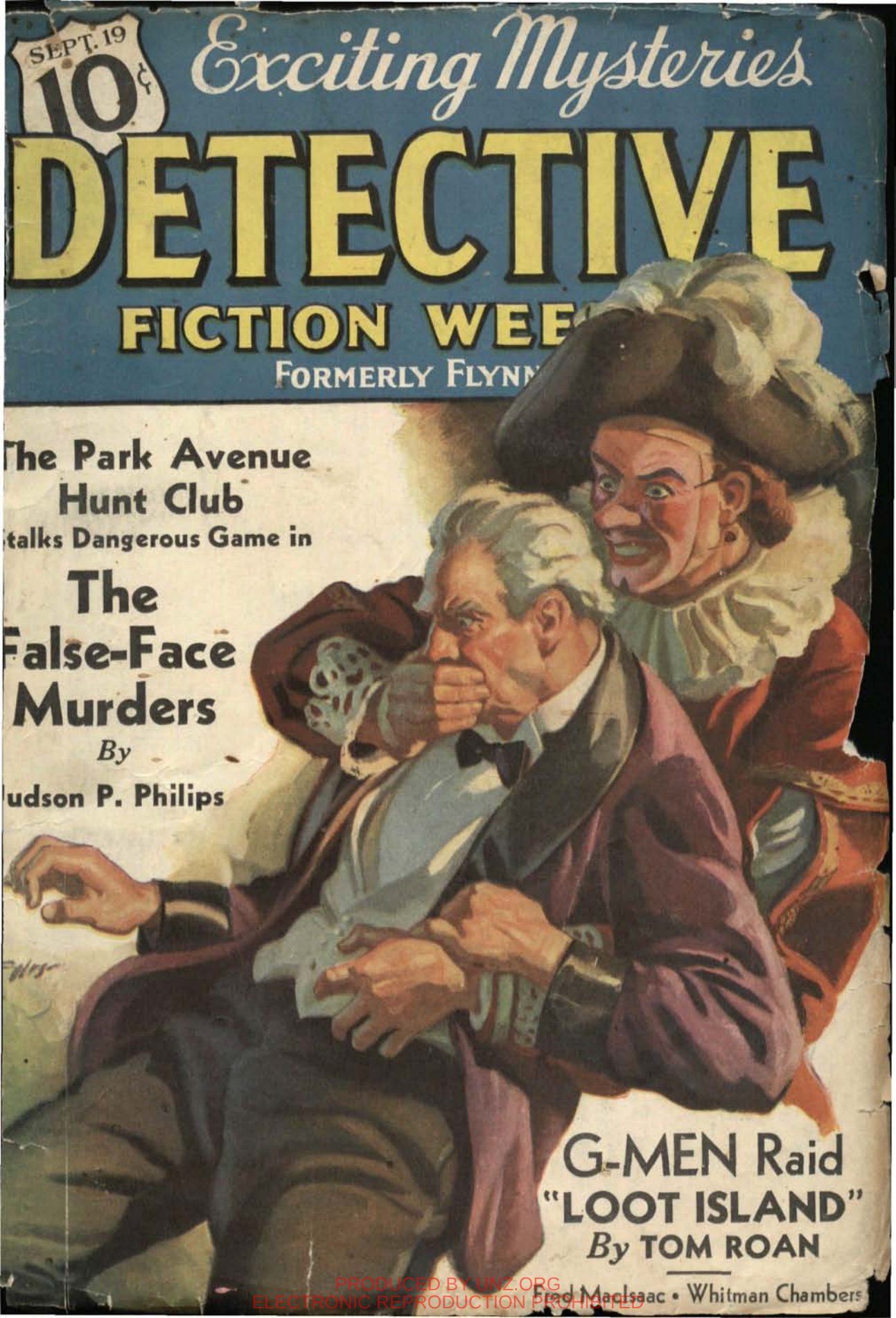

The Park Avenue Hunt Club Stalks Dangerous Game in

The False-Face Murders

By Judson P. Philips

G-MEN Raid "LOOT ISLAND"

By TOM ROAN

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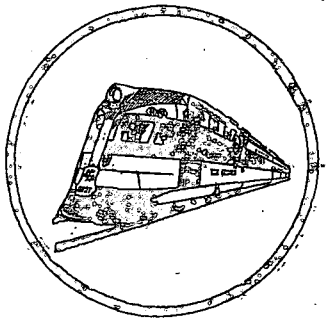

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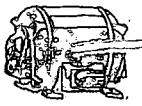

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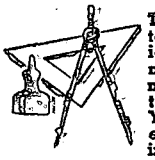

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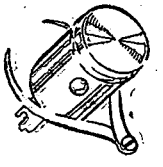

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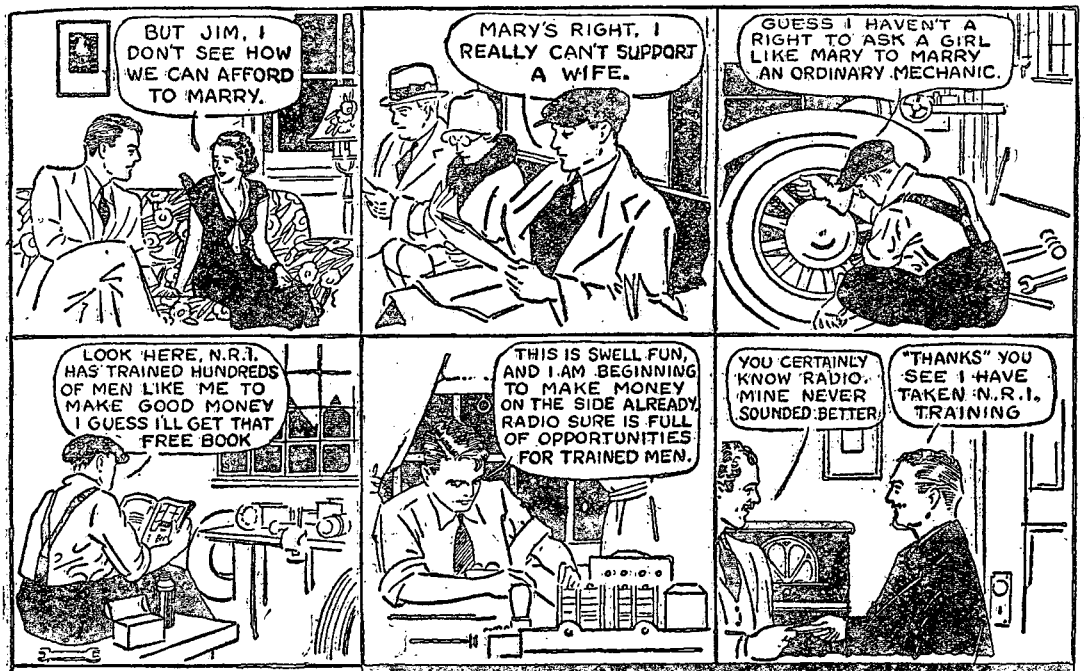
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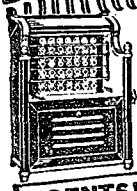

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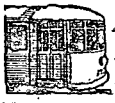
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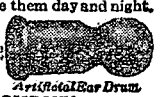

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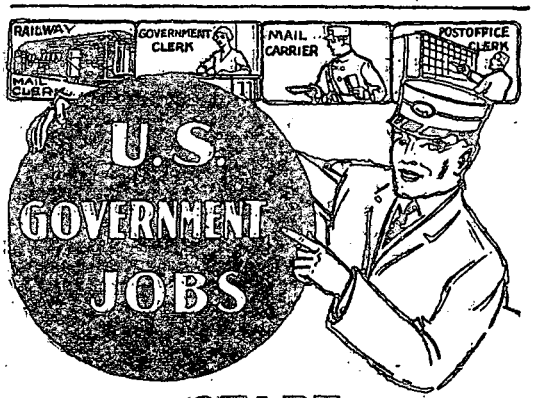

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Flashes from the Police Front

(NOTE: It is the purpose of this department to warn readers in all sections of the country of the latest schemes designed to defraud them, and in many instances, the names and descriptions of the operators. If you are approached by any of these schemers, get all the information possible and report the circumstances immediately to your local police authorities. They will know what to do. Rest assured that you will be doing someone a favor. Man is the only animal that can be skinned more than once.)

STAMPS AND COINS

New Country Formed By Fakers

SALESMEN are working throughout the United States, calling upon dealers who sell stamps and coins to collectors. These salesmen claim that a new country has been founded. It is called the Principality of Atlantis and is composed of 14 islands, mostly located in the Caribbean Sea. One of the islands is supposed to be off shore from Ecuador and the Principality is supposed to have received the recognition of the Ecuadorian Government. Ecuador has granted no such recognition and its officials know nothing about the new country.

WANTED

H. L. Walker and L. H. Howard

H. L. WALKER, about 40 years of age, hazel eyes, smooth shaven, 5 ft. 10 inches tall, weight about 160, defrauded a Tacoma, Wash., woman of $100 in a confidence game. Walker claimed to be an investor in a defunct Seattle company and obtained the knowledge that this woman was also an investor. He claimed he was forming a group of these investors and believed he could salvage some of her money for her. The woman paid him $100 as he requested and during her conversation told him she was an investor in the Peoples Gas & Oil Co.

The following day a L. H. Howard, described as 40 years of age, horn-rimmed glasses, very tanned face, small, appeared and asked if she were an investor in the Peoples Gas & Oil Co. He explained that he was a geologist from the University of Minnesota and that her lease was directly over an oil dome. He claimed that he had an option on the adjoining five acres and could sell both her land and his for $27,500. She turned over to him stock and cash in the amount of $230, and he disappeared.

These men are traveling together in a 1936 Ford sedan. Warrants have been issued in Tacoma.

INSURANCE

Don't Buy Policies in These Companies

AGENTS claiming to represent the Fidelity Mutual Association and the Consolidated Insurance Underwriters of Minneapolis, Minn., are defrauding residents of the Southwest in the sale of health and accident and automobile liability contracts in these companies. Neither company is licensed to sell insurance in any state and M. E.

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Flashes from the Police Front

Bean, the operator of both companies, is in jail.

CALIFORNIA

Securities Firm Denied License

THE Corporation Commission of California, following a protracted hearing, has denied a license to the American Fidelity Corporation to sell securities in that state. Anyone approached by persons claiming to represent the above company should report the facts immediately to the Commission.

ENCYCLOPEDIA

Mitchell's "Bargains" Not Delivered

W. A. MITCHELL, who claims to be vice-president of the Mid-West Publishing Co. of Chicago, is selling a "combination offer" of the Modern American Encyclopedia and the New Century Dictionary at "bargain prices."

Mitchell is not the vice-president and is not authorized to solicit any subscriptions in the name of this reputable company.

TRANS-LUX

Advance Fee Artists Working in the East

TWO individuals giving their names as H. G. Barlow and H. C. Jacobson and claiming to be principals of the Trans-Lux Screen Service, 103rd St. and Broadway, New York City, visited Scranton, Pa. They proposed to install an advertising screen service on the side of a local office building and solicited advance payments from local merchants. They left the city without putting the advertising service in effect.

Subsequently, Barlow and an associate put on another campaign in Troy, N. Y. Contrary to the impression which some business men have had, Trans-Lux Screen Service has no connection with Trans-Lux Daylight Picture Screen Corporation, a well-known and established firm with offices at 1270 Sixth Avenue, New York City.

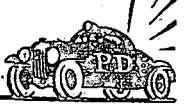
LINEN

Schemer Uses New Trick

RAPHAIL KNAPP has been operating on the Pacific Coast and is reported to be moving to Texas. He claims to be the president of linen factories in Ireland, also president of the Dresden Manufacturers Association.

Knapp borrows large sums on linens, which he claims are valuable, to enable him to pay the duty on a large shipment of linens held at the customs house. He agrees to repay the loan after he delivers the incoming shipment to the buyers. After Knapp disappears, the lenders discover that the loans are twice the value of the shipment.

Knapp is elderly, between 60 and 70 years of age, medium height, heavy set, slightly stooped, and carries a cane. Sometimes he is accompanied by a young man whom he calls his nephew.



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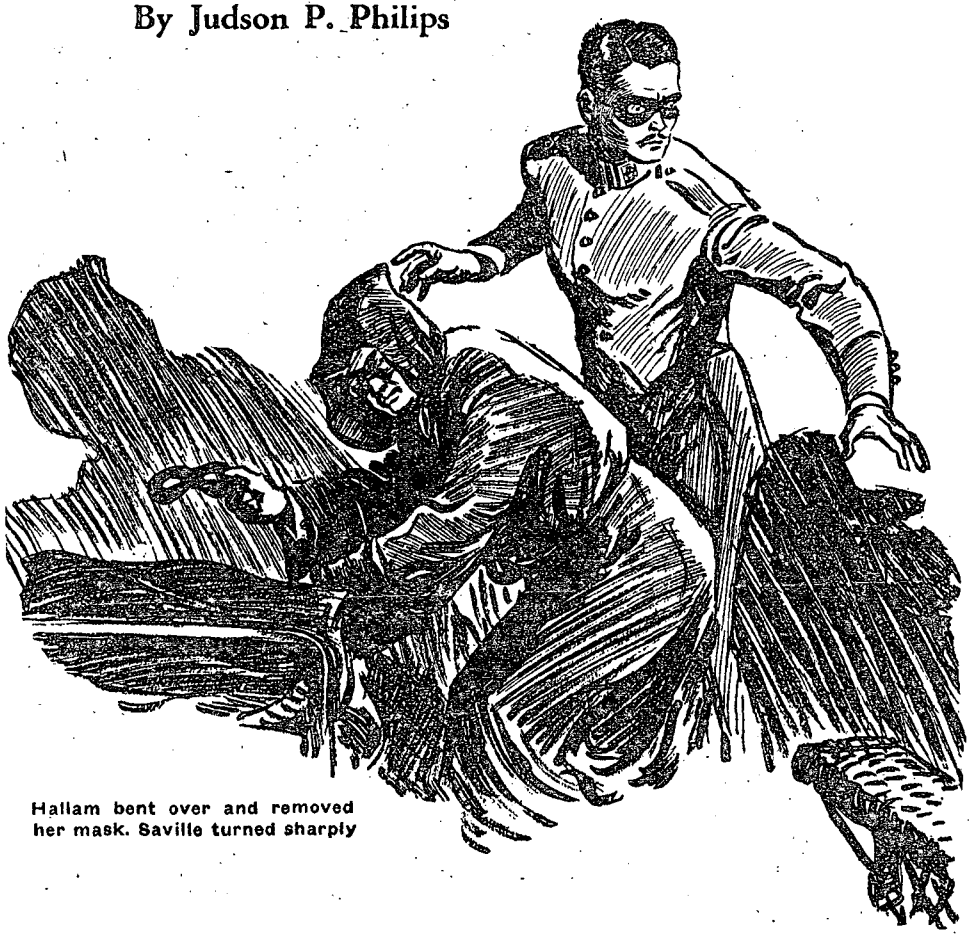
The False-Face Murders

By Judson P. Philips



Hallam bent over and removed her mask. Saville turned sharply

CHAPTER I

The Lady Proposes

GEOFFREY SAVILLE looked past the girl into the fire on the earth—avoiding the eager searching look in her eyes. She was sitting on the hassock at his feet, her eyes fixed on his dark, handsome face. He felt that his hands were gripping the arms of his chair with abnormal severity. He loosed them and fumbled in the hip pocket of his dress trousers for his cigarette case. He was wearing the bright scarlet mess jacket of an English army officer. The girl was brilliant in a gypsy dress of some sort, a flaming scarf hiding hair that was bright, glittering gold.

"No pockets in this damned jacket," Saville observed. He knew it was an inane remark. He offered the girl his case, but she shook her head, never taking her eyes from his face.

"Geoffrey, you haven't been listening," she accused.

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"I'm Sergeant Burlingame," the Trooper said. "What's wrong here?"

3-PART NOVEL

Geoffrey Saville, John Jericho and Arthur Hallam — the Famous Park Avenue Hunt Club—Fight the Greatest Battle of Their Joint Spectacular Career

The muscles along Saville's jaw tightened . . . rippled under the bronzed skin. As the firelight flickered on his face, his rather extraordinary resemblance to Ronald Colman, the actor, was sharply noticeable. He smiled, a crooked, tender little smile. "Yes, darling, I've been listening," he said "I've been listening." "Please, Geoffrey, please! If you must be so darned paternal, try it on someone else. You say 'darling' just as you used to when I was twelve years old."

"I couldn't be any fonder of you than I was when you were twelve," he

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said. He remembered the weeks he had spent here at John Malcolm's magnificent estate on the Hudson ten years ago. He had been suffering from a severe gun-shot wound at the time. A hunting accident, it was called. He smiled grimly as he remembered the desperate circumstances under which that wound had really been received. Mary Malcolm had been twelve then, as beautiful a child as she was a woman. She had fallen madly in love with her father's guest, and he had spent all his time with her. They had gone fishing together on the river; he had taught her to ride; they had taken long walks together in the woods and he had told her thrilling stories about his experiences in the Intelligence Service during the war. These stories would have been better suited for a small boy, but Saville didn't know any other kind of story. He had taken Mary Malcolm to her first Artists and Models Carnival in Woodstock, and he had worn a scarlet mess jacket that night and she had worn a tiny gypsy costume. If he had had an eye for women's clothes, he would have realized that she was wearing an exact replica of that costume tonight. Ten years ago that little girl had seen in Saville a prince charming—a gallant, dashing, heroic prince charming. And now, ten years later, he apparently held the same place in her heart. He had stayed away for two years because . . . well, because it would have been all too easy for him to lose his head. She wanted him to marry her. He knew that. And he knew, with a grim certainty, that marriage was impossible for him.

"You can't spend all your life living with those two friends of yours, Geoffrey," she said, pounding her little white fist against his knee. "Like three old women you are . . . living together in your house on Park Avenue! Oh, I haven't any shame, Geoffrey. I love you. You know that. How long are you going to keep me waiting?"

He leaned forward and took her hands in his. "Listen," he said gently. "Listen, Mary, I . . ." And then he stopped. What could he say? He couldn't tell her that the reason he couldn't marry her was because his life was as uncertain as an April day. He couldn't tell her that there were scores of men who would kill him on sight if they had the chance—that death might catch up with him at any moment. He couldn't tell her that far from living like three old women, he and his two friends, John Jericho and Arthur Hallam, were living perhaps more dangerous lives than any other three men in the world. He smiled faintly. He wondered what she would say if he told her that he, Geoffrey Saville, was the leader of the now notorious Park Avenue Hunt Club, that secret organization that had struck terror to the heart of the criminal world.

HE glanced across the big library. John Jericho, a red-headed giant of a man, dressed in the green shirt and leather jerkin of one of Robin Hood's archers, was sprawled out in an armchair, smoking a very modern-looking pipe. Jericho, former big-game hunter who had given up that sport to hunt men along with his friend Geoffrey. The grandest man to have on your side in a fight. A crack shot, a tenacious and savage battler.

And on the other side of the room was short, fat Arthur Hallam, eyes twinkling behind steel-rimmed spectacles, nibbling on cheese and crackers. He was looking thoughtfully at the chess board that was placed between

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him and John Malcolm, Mary's millionaire father. Hallam was dressed in the black robes of a monk. Only John Malcolm was in the conventional dinner jacket. Saville smiled. Hallam, one of the greatest chess players in the world, would make mince meat of John Malcolm, just as John Malcolm had made mincemeat of his business competitors in the last thirty years. Hallam's chess-playing mind was what made him a master strategist in their campaigns against the criminal world.

Saville's face hardened. He couldn't tell Mary Malcolm these things. He couldn't tell her that, much as he sometimes ached to take her in his arms and carry her off to some quiet place where they could spend the rest of their lives in peace and contentment, that his life was dedicated to hunting dangerous men. That there could never be any peace, any quitting. That always there would be someone hunting for *him!*

So he said, "Darling, I'm nearly forty and you're . . ."

"You're thirty-seven," she told him. "I looked up your birth date in Who's Who."

"And you're twenty-two!"

"So what?" inquired Mary Malcolm with the direct logic of youth. And because he couldn't give an answer she went on: "Geoffrey, there are a dozen young men camping on my trail. There's David Hilary, whom you met here tonight. But there can never be anyone but you, Geoffrey. Oh, I know what you're saying. You're saying it's a school girl infatuation. But it isn't. I tell you it isn't."

Saville knew that it wasn't. That was the devil of it.

"Oh, Geoffrey, why have you come back after two years if it wasn't to ask me—to tell me . . ."

And again he couldn't tell her the truth. He couldn't tell her that he had come back because her father, John Malcolm, was desperately afraid of something—so afraid that he had written an almost hysterical letter to Saville.

"Please come," he had begged, "you and your friends. It is carnival week-end, as you know, so the house will be filled with guests. I may need you, Geoffrey, as I never needed anyone. It is useless for me to go to the police. They are very efficient *after* a crime is committed. But that would be of very little interest to me *then!*"

John Malcolm, with millions, with power, with the courage born in the crucible of competition, was terribly afraid of something—something he had not yet disclosed to Geoffrey.

"Listen, Mary," he said. "Marry your David Hilary. He will probably make you ten times happier than ever I could. Let me be the Prince Charming I was when you were twelve. Let me be in the background—someone you can always count on in any emergency—someone who . . ." Trite! Trite and so unsatisfactory to her, he told himself.

"It's no good, Geoffrey," she said. "There will never be anyone but you."

His heart was painful against his ribs and the taste in his mouth was bitter. It was everything he wanted—and the one thing he couldn't have. He glanced over at John Malcolm who was studying the chess board through his pince-nez. There were deep tight lines at the corners of his mouth, and his lips twitched unconsciously from time to time. His face had a gray look under its mop of snow-white hair. What had frightened John Malcolm, Geoffrey wondered?

He looked down at Mary. "I should

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think it was time to start for the carnival," he said.

"Yes, Geoffrey. Time to be gay," she said with surprising harshness. "The tenth anniversary of our meeting, Geoffrey. Oh, we must be very gay indeed."

CHAPTER II

The Price of Information

MISS MARIAN TWIG hung up the telephone receiver in her office in the Hotel De Witt in Kingston and said "Damn!" very emphatically. Miss Twig was the hotel's public stenographer, but if anybody had stepped into her office at this moment—any out-of-towner—he would have been a trifle bewildered. A public stenographer dressed in a gypsy costume is not a very usual sight. But nobody thinks anything of seeing costumes within forty miles of Woodstock on Carnival Day. Miss Twig took up her stenographer's note book and several sharpened pencils, looked at her very pretty face in the mirror.

She paused to speak to the clerk at the desk.

"You lucky stiff," said the clerk. "I wish I was going to the Carnival."

"I'm not so darned lucky," said Miss Twig. "Some fellow named Salazar who has rented the McAndrew place between here and Woodstock says he wants me to do some work. He says it isn't much—but it'll probably take all night!"

"Why didn't you tell him this was your day off?"

"Can't afford it," said Miss Twig. "Anybody with dough enough to rent the McAndrew place may have a lot of work for me for the rest of the summer."

"You're getting all the big wigs," said the clerk. "John Malcolm yesterday and now this Samovar, or whatever his name is. Say, if you got steady work with John Malcolm that *would* be something!"

"Not a chance," said Miss Twig. "He has his own private secretary. He met a man down here to talk business and had to make some unexpected notes. That's the only reason he used me."

"Well, I hope you get to the Carnival," said the clerk.

"I hope Mr. Salazar won't mind dictating to a girl in a gypsy costume," said Miss Marian Twig.

MR. MAX SALAZAR had hung up the receiver at his end of the wire at the conclusion of his conversation with Miss Twig. He turned away from the phone to face the two other men in the room. One of them was a tall, distinguished-looking man with iron-gray hair at his temples and a dark, military-looking mustache. The other was a square, powerfully built man with close-cropped blond hair and a stubborn German face.

"She's coming," said Mr. Salazar, in a very soft voice.

Mr. Salazar's hair was black, smooth, oily. His eyes were black and set rather too closely together. When he smiled he showed his very even, very white teeth—and he smiled a great deal, though his eyes were not smiling. His hands were long and slender and white. He reached out one of them now to a black enameled humidor and took out a very long, thin cigar, which he lit.

"You think she'll talk?" asked the military man.

"My dear Major, never having laid eyes on the girl I have no idea how hard it is going to be to persuade her.

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But she will talk." Mr. Salazar's smile widened. "I guarantee you she will talk."

Herman Schott, the man with the close-cropped blond hair, laughed. It wasn't a pleasant sound. "Oh, she will talk, Major Bostwick," he said. "No one has ever held out much from me and Max."

Major Bostwick tugged at his mustache. "It sounds like a damned risky business to me."

"We've got to take risks, Major," said Salazar, in that soft voice. "Malcolm has stolen a march on us. We can't wait for the usual machinery to get rolling."

A slight shudder shook the Major's shoulders and he stood up. "I think I'll have a drink," he said.

It was perhaps ten minutes later that Miss Marian Twig rang the doorbell at the old McAndrew's place. An impassive-faced servant opened the door to her. If he was astonished at her gypsy costume he didn't show it.

"Mr. Salazar is waiting for you in his study," he said, and led the way.

Mr. Salazar was seated at his desk, quite alone in the room, when Miss Twig stepped in. He flashed her a very bright, very ingratiating smile. "Ah, Miss Twig. It was very good of you to come, especially as I see you are on your way to the Carnival."

She tried to smile back. Something about this man made it a little difficult. "If I didn't think it was bad luck to turn down jobs I'd have turned this one down," she said. "The Carnival only comes once a year."

"But I shan't keep you but a moment, Miss Twig. As a matter of fact, it was not to do any dictating that I sent for you. I wanted to have a little chat with you."

"Well, I'm here!" said Miss Twig, laughing a little nervously. She couldn't understand why the palms of her hands had started to sweat. Mr. Salazar seemed like a very charming man. He leaned back in his chair now and looked thoughtfully at the spiral of blue smoke curling up from his cigar.

"There's just one way to get along in this world," he said, smoothly. "That is to seize opportunity by the horns. I am about to give you the chance to make"—he looked at her shrewdly—"to make one hundred dollars."

MISS TWIG felt her hands tightening on the arms of her chair. There was something fishy about this . . . something about this man that made her very uneasy. She suddenly wished fervently that she had broken her rule of never turning down a job. "I don't know anything I could do that would be worth a hundred dollars to you, Mr. Salazar," she said.

"Oh, but you can . . . you can," said Mr. Salazar. "And I'll come right to the point. Yesterday, I happen to know, you did some work for Mr. John Malcolm. You made some memoranda for him, took down some lists of names." Mr. Salazar leaned forward. "It is worth a hundred dollars to me to know what those memoranda were—and as many names as you can remember that were on that list."

Miss Twig looked shocked. "But, Mr. Salazar! After all, anything I do for a client is kept in the strictest confidence. I couldn't possibly . . ."

"Perhaps two hundred dollars would be a more entertaining figure," said Mr. Salazar, smiling. But his eyes were very cold.

Miss Twig stood up. She was

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frightened. The man's black eyes frightened her. "I'm afraid you're wasting your time and mine, Mr. Salazar," she said.

"Name your own figure, then," said Mr. Salazar, very sharply.

"But I wouldn't go back on the trust Mr. Malcolm placed in me—not for anything," said Miss Twig. "So I guess I'll be going."

"Just a minute," said Mr. Salazar. She didn't notice that he had pressed a button under the edge of his desk. "You will save yourself a great deal of grief, Miss Twig, if you will accept my offer. And I will raise that offer to five hundred dollars."

"I'm leaving," said Miss Twig. She turned to go, but there was someone else in the room now—a man with a close-cropped blond head. He was almost more frightening than Mr. Salazar. He just laughed and said nothing. Miss Twig turned quickly toward the French doors at the end of the room, but they were blocked now by a man with a dark, military mustache. Miss Twig could hear her own breath making strange noises in her throat, choking her. Mr. Salazar just sat at his desk, watching the blue smoke curl up from his cigar. None of the men spoke. Cold, blind, unreasoning terror seized Miss Twig, yet something of the stern qualities of some New England forebear made her cry out:

"Nothing you could do would make me tell you, Mr. Salazar! And believe me, you'll get into a peck of trouble for this!"

Mr. Salazar watched the ash drop from his cigar with a neat little plunk into the brass ash tray at his elbow. "I should hate to have to persuade you by—er—violence to tell me what you know," he said.

She was shaking now, shaking like a very frail tree buffeted in a storm. "*You wouldn't dare!*" she said, almost in a whisper.

Then she heard a step behind her. Herman Schott was closing in on her. Miss Twig screamed, one piercing shriek after another. When she stopped, the ring of it was in her ears, but Mr. Salazar and the others were silent.

"Well, Miss Twig?" asked Mr. Salazar, softly.

"Never!" said Miss Twig.

It was then that Herman Schott took her from behind and pinioned her arms. With a quick, skilled movement he had fastened her wrists tightly together with a strip of wide adhesive tape. Roughly he forced Miss Twig into a chair. Then he came around in front of her and struck her a savage flat handed blow on the cheek.

"Talk!" he said.

There were tears in Miss Twig's eyes—tears of mortal terror. But her lips were pressed tightly together. She shook her head. He bound her tightly to the chair now while Mr. Salazar and the Major watched without comment. Mr. Salazar was utterly calm. The Major tugged at his mustache. Schott knelt in front of the girl now and removed her shoes and stockings.

"If I could borrow your cigar, Max," he suggested to Mr. Salazar.

"Certainly," said Mr. Salazar. He drew several times on the cigar till the end was blowing bright red. He looked at the girl. "This is going to be excruciatingly painful, Miss Twig. And it's so unnecessary, if you will only tell me what I want to know."

"You will go to jail for this!" Miss Twig promised, a note of pitiful bravado in her voice.

Mr. Salazar sighed and handed the glowing cigar to Herman Schott.

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Major Bristow turned around and looked out through the French doors at the garden beyond.

CHAPTER III

Death Dances

THE party at the Malcolm house was all gathered in the great hall near the front door. There was Mary Malcolm and the young man who was trying to marry her, David Hilary, tall and blond and a college athlete type. There was Saville, and Jericho and Hallam. And there was Leon Battersea, John Malcolm's private secretary, a thin, stoop-shouldered, hawk-faced man with thin dark hair, who peered out at life through very thick-lensed spectacles. Saville remembered that Battersea was supposed to be some sort of mathematical wizard. Certainly his personality was not very magnetic. These were all in costume, and John Malcolm stood watching them as they prepared to leave.

"Sorry you're not coming, Father," said Mary Malcolm.

"There's so much work I must do, my dear," said John Malcolm.

"Then we're off," Mary called.

Saville lingered behind as the others went out to the cars. "Look here, sir," he said to John Malcolm, "you haven't told me anything yet. If you want me to stay . . ."

John Malcolm put a hand on Saville's arm. Saville could feel it shaking slightly. "Run along to the party, Geoffrey. There is no danger tonight. When you come back you'll find me in my study. It doesn't matter how late. I'll tell you what it's all about then. Mary would be terribly disappointed if you didn't go to the party."

"The devil with the party," said Saville. He was disturbed by a strange undercurrent of concern for the millionaire. "If you want me to stay. . . ."

"I wouldn't think of it," said Malcolm. "There's no danger tonight. I'm sure of that." Saville thought he said it like a man trying to convince himself. "I want you to go."

Saville shrugged. "You know best, old man. Since you've kept me entirely in the dark I'll have to take your word for it."

"Have a good time," urged Malcolm.

Mary, David Hilary and Leon Battersea had gone ahead in one car. Saville joined his two friends in their own special-bodied limousine—a bullet proof body, with bullet-proof windshield and glass. Wu, the Hunt Club's little Chinese servant, was at the wheel. They set out for the fair grounds.

The artists and models carnival in Woodstock is a gay, mad affair. Color—color is the keynote. There is a midway with booths containing gambling games, ring-tossing games, and all the hoop-la that goes with a fair. There is a great open-hair dance floor with continuous music—music that seems to grow a little wilder as night comes on and the grounds are lit by flares. But the real color lies in the crowd itself. Everyone is in costume and masked—or wearing some sort of false face. It seems as if for a moment inhibitions were forgotten. Everyone seems to be running or dancing, Saville thought. No one quiet or sedate. The blare of the jazz orchestra above the sound of high-pitched laughter and shouts. Men and women prancing about hand in hand, or locked in embraces, oblivious of the fact that hundreds of others were milling about them.

Somehow the spirit of gayety failed

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to take hold of Saville. John Malcolm was on his mind—John Malcolm gray and shaking. He kept his eye out for Mary, but he didn't see her. There were dozens of masked gypsies. She and young Hilary were somewhere else on the grounds. Some girl had dashed up to Jericho and dragged him off. Saville stood near the dance floor with Hallam. They were both wearing little black silk masks. Saville thought rather grimly that they had worn these same masks on innumerable occasions . . . rendezvous with death!

The dance floor was packed with people. The music was playing some sort of wild Harlem rhapsody. There were flares stuck along the railing of the floor, casting weird shadows on papier-maché false faces. Saville was only watching in the most superficial fashion because his mind was elsewhere—back at the house with John Malcolm who was afraid.

"Extraordinary couple," said Arthur Hallam at his elbow.

"Eh?"

"The chap in the Cyrano mask and his girl," said Hallam.

Saville saw them then. The man was tall. The Cyrano mask with its long, upturned nose and straggling hair which hung down shoulder length gave him a grotesque look. The false face was too big for the body. And that body was moving in fantastic gyrations. The girl was a gypsy, a black mask covering her face. Her head hung back loosely. The man had both arms around her and held her close to him as he cavorted about the floor.

"The girl looks as if she had imbibed a little too much of the juice of the apple," said Saville.

He heard Hallam's breath making a little hissing sound between his teeth, but he thought nothing of it. Then Hallam's hard fingers bit into his arm.

"I'm afraid you're wrong, Geoffrey," he said, in an unnatural quiet voice.

"Wrong?"

"Oh, very wrong," said Arthur Hallam. "That girl is dead, Geoffrey."

FOR one awful moment Geoffrey Saville's heart stopped beating. Dead! A dead gypsy! But it wasn't Mary. He remembered now. Mary had worn a flaming scarf over her hair. This girl's was blue. And then his brain cleared and became crystal clear. Little damp beads of sweat on his forehead were all that remained of that one dreadful moment.

He saw now . . . the girl's head lolling back as the leering Cyrano mask bent over her closely . . . so that the lolling was not quite so apparent. And he saw also now that her feet were not touching the floor. Those arms around her waist and shoulders were lifting her clear of the floor as the man danced wildly about.

Saville breathed a curse. He saw Arthur Hallam's lower lip caught between his teeth . . . below the level of the black silk mask. "You're sure, Arthur? She could have passed out!"

Hallam shook his head. Hallam, ex-medical student who would have made a very fine doctor had he not chosen man-hunting as a career. "He must be strong," said Hallam. "Terribly strong to make it look so natural."

"But, Arthur," Saville cried sharply, "why should he go on dancing with a—with a corpse?"

Hallam looked up and Saville saw the glitter of his eyes through the slits of the mask. "Perhaps we should find out," he said, softly.

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Then the music stopped. The saxaphone gave a weird little shriek to indicate that the dance was over for the moment. People began crowding down the narrow steps from the dance floor. Saville's eyes were riveted on the man in the Cyrano mask. Through the mouth hole of the false face, he heard the man laughing as he swung the girl up in his arms. One arm was under her knees . . . one under her shoulders with a hand beneath the head . . . to keep it from lolling. It was all in the spirit of the thing for a man to carry his girl . . . a laughing man!

Then Saville was at the foot of the stairs and the Cyrano man, with his gruesome burden was at the top of the steps starting down. Saville blocked his way.

"Just a moment, please," said Saville, in a cold voice.

The man stopped laughing. The macaber false face switched quickly from left to right . . . behind it Saville sensed the man was looking for an avenue of escape. Then the man dropped the girl. The body hit the steps and bounced horribly down onto the grass. People laughed. A couple of drunks! Then the Cyrano man, standing three steps above Saville, launched a savage kick which landed squarely on the point of Saville's jaw and sent him staggering back. Then he leaped—a great leap out into the milling crowd.

Saville's head was spinning but he staggered forward in pursuit. Cyrano had dashed off through the crowd and was swallowed up. It was useless to attempt to follow him. He would discard the mask and be hopeless to find in this gay crowd. Saville turned back.

Hallam's short squat figure was staggering under the burden of the girl whom he now held in his arms. A crowd was collecting around him.

"She's passed out," said Hallam. He laughed quite naturally, and everyone else laughed, too.

"You mean she isn't . . . ?" Saville started to speak.

"You don't want to start a panic, do you, Geoffrey?" asked Arthur Hallam, severely.

They had gone only a few steps when Saville saw a man in a Pierrot costume with a little red band around his sleeve . . . one of the carnival officials.

"Where can we take this girl?" said Saville. "She's ill."

"There's a shack over at the north end of the fair grounds," said the man. "Is it serious?"

"Possibly," said Saville shortly. "You have State Troopers here on the grounds? Send the man in charge to the shack."

"How about a doctor?" said the man.

"By all means . . . if you can find one in this howling mob."

They found the shack at the far end of the fair grounds. It was empty except for an old army cot. There was a flare burning just outside which gave sufficient light for them to see as Hallam laid the girl's body gently on the cot.

"She's been dead a long time," said Hallam, quietly. "Probably several hours."

"But Arthur!"

"I know . . . I know!" said Hallam grimly. "Why was that lunatic lugging her around? Well, I can think of reasons, Geoffrey. But I want to know *how* she died." He bent over and removed the mask from her face. She might have been a pretty girl, but

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at the moment her teeth were bared in a ghastly grin of death. Saville turned away. She was young. No older than Mary.

CHAPTER IV

Murder Leaves a Trail

AND then a State Trooper walked into the shack. "I'm Sergeant Burlingame," he said. "What's wrong here?" The carnival director in the Pierrot costume was peering over the trooper's shoulder.

"This girl is dead," said Hallam, in a monotonous kind of voice. "Did you find a doctor? Because it doesn't matter. She's been dead for hours."

"Good Lord!" said the trooper. "Where did you find her?"

"A man was dancing with her," said Hallam.

"What?"

"That's right. He was dancing with her while she was dead. We spotted it. We tried to intercept him but he got away. He dropped the body. I brought it here."

"Are you guys stewed?" demanded the trooper, suspiciously.

Hallam sighed. "I'm not," he said, "but I'm going to attend to it as soon as I can. It so happens, Sergeant, that I know a good deal about medicine. If you will permit me to examine her. . . ."

"The medical examiner ought to see her before. . . ."

"She's been moved from the scene of the crime, Sergeant. It wouldn't matter."

"Crime?" said the sergeant.

"You don't think she died naturally?" asked Hallam in a voice of mild surprise. "She was murdered, of course. I'd like to know how. I should think you would, too."

"Say, who are you guys anyhow?" said the trooper. His hand rested on the gun he carried ready near his right hip.

"We're friends of John Malcolm's," said Saville. "Spending the week-end with him. We came here with Miss Malcolm."

"Ah," said the trooper, a note of greater respect in his voice. "But this guy she was dancing with . . . who was he? Did you know him? Can you describe him?"

Hallam shook his head. "We didn't know him. He was about six feet tall with very powerful arms and shoulders—must have had, to dance with this corpse and make it look natural. But that's as far as I can go. He wore a Cyrano mask, and . . ."

"A what?" The sergeant was taking notes.

"A mask made to resemble Cyrano de Bergerac," said Hallam. His eyes were on the dead girl. "A long upturned nose, and false hair that came down to his shoulders. Naturally he will have discarded it by now. May I examine the girl?"

"Go ahead," said Burlingame. He turned to the carnival director, "Find my other men and send them here. We got to pick up that Cyrano guy."

Hallam knelt beside the girl. With skillful fingers he began his examination. Saville and the trooper stood back of him waiting in silence. Presently Hallam spoke without looking up.

"Her back is broken," he said. "It looks as if somebody had caught her from behind—somebody very strong—put a knee in her back and pulled her head back until her spine snapped." His voice was dry, without emotion. "The broken back might not have killed her but she was probably choked to death in the process."

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The trooper, had paled, was wiping sweat from his face with a colored handkerchief.

"And she couldn't have danced, even if she had been alive," Hallam went on. "Look."

Saville and the sergeant moved in closer. Hallam had taken off the girl's shoes. The bottoms of her feet were terribly burned. It looked as if a red hot cigar had been pressed against the soles of her feet in a dozen places. Saville had seen that sort of burn before. Burns inflicted by a torturer.

Hallam stood up. "I take it you don't know the girl, Sergeant?"

"Never saw her before," said Burlingame. "But that isn't strange because hundreds of outsiders come to this carnival. There's more outsiders than local people."

Hallam reached for a cigarette in the folds of his monk's costume. "There doesn't seem to be much more we can do here, Sergeant," he said "Unfortunately we can't give you a more detailed description of the man. If there are any questions you'd like to ask us we can be reached at John Malcolm's place."

The sergeant wrote down their names in his note book and they left the shack.

"I'm going to have a look around the grounds, just on the chance I might recognize that bird without his mask," said Saville.

"Wait!" Hallam's voice was sharp. "I neglected to show this to the sergeant because—well, perhaps you can guess why." He handed Saville a piece of paper. "It was in the pocket of the girl's dress."

It was a check—a check for fifty dollars. It was made payable to Marian Twig, and signed John Malcolm.

"I thought," said Hallam quietly, "that perhaps we should go back and see Malcolm."

Saville's lips tightened. "Let's go," he said.

THEY found Jericho at the rifle-shooting booth with a group of goggle-eyed natives around him watching him perform miracles with a twenty-two rifle. They dragged him away protesting that he was having a wonderful time. Not till they got him to the car and Wu headed the big machine back for the Malcolm place did they tell him what had already happened.

"There may be some delay in identifying the girl," said Hallam. "We thought perhaps Malcolm should know what has happened . . ."

"But what connection could there be between Malcolm and this girl?" said Jericho.

"Fifty dollars," said Hallam dryly. "That was a particularly brutal and unpleasant murder, John. Malcolm has said that he was in some sort of danger. I—well, I'll feel better when we find out just what his connection with Marian Twig really is."

Saville sat in silence on the front seat beside Wu as the little Chinese sent the car speeding through the darkness. He suddenly had the conviction that he should never have gone to the carnival without first hearing Malcolm's story. John Malcolm wasn't a hysterics. That he was afraid was very definite proof that there was something very real to be afraid of. Now this savage and macaber killing of the girl who had in her pocket one of Malcolm's personal checks. It was not a payroll check. Leon Battersea signed all those. Nor did Malcolm's signature appear on any checks given

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to employees in the many great businesses he controlled. This was a personal check, written in Malcolm's own hand.

"Can you give it a little more gun, Wu?" said Saville.

"Detestable road very winding," said the Chinese, but his foot went down on the accelerator.

Saville felt better as they approached the lodge house which stood at the entrance gates to the estate. A chain was across the road and a watchman stood guard. He flashed a torch into the car.

"You're back early, gentlemen," he said. He took down the chain and the big car rolled up the blue stone drive.

Malcolm was taking precautions in any event. As the car pulled up at the front door Saville sprang out and ran up the steps. The door was locked and on a chain-bolt. The butler looked out, smiled, and let them in.

"Where's Mr. Malcolm?" Saville said.

"In his study, sir. He's been there ever since you left."

Saville went along the hall to study door with Hallam and Jericho behind him. He knocked.

"Malcolm! It's Geoffrey."

There was no answer.

Unhesitating, Saville opened the door. The room was dark. Saville stepped in and felt along the wall for the light switch. As the room was suddenly flooded with light he cried out:

"Malcolm!"

John Malcolm lay sprawled on the floor of the study, his right arm crumpled under him at a peculiarly grotesque angle. Hallam came through the door quickly, quietly, and knelt beside the millionaire. He bent with his ear to Malcolm's chest.

"Quick, help me get him to that couch!" he rapped.

For perhaps five minutes Hallam worked frantically on the millionaire. At last he turned away from the couch and sweat was running off his face.

"It's no go," he said. "He's dead. The body was still warm. I thought perhaps . . ."

"What got him?" said Saville, in a harsh, grating voice.

Hallam's eyes had a curious light in them. "His back is broken," he said, very softly. "Just like the girl—just like Marian Twig."

CHAPTER V

Complication

SAVILLE spun around and went out once more into the hall. The butler was still at his place by the front door.

"Robinson!" Saville called sharply. The butler came up to him. "Who has visited Mr. Malcolm tonight since we left?"

"Why, no one, sir. There's been no one at all. Is—is something . . . ?"

"Mr. Malcolm has been murdered," announced Saville harshly.

The butler looked as if he were going to collapse. Every sign of color left his face and his knees seemed to buckle under him. Saville had to catch him under the elbow to keep him from falling.

"Buck up, man. I've got to know who has been here."

"No one, sir, I swear it," said Robinson. "I've been at the door all evening. The first time I've taken the chain off was to let you gentlemen in."

"Who is in the house beside yourself?"

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"Only the staff, sir. There are eight of us all told. But none of them has been in this part of the house."

"Is there any other watchman outside except the man at the lodge gate?"

"Yes, sir. There's one other who patrols the grounds. Mr. Malcolm is afraid of cranks, sir."

"Go to the servants and tell them none of them is to leave the house. Then get the two watchmen here at once. And make it snappy, Robinson." Saville turned and went back into the study.

Jericho was over by the French windows at the far end of the study. "It looks as though the murderer came in this way, Geoffrey," he said. "The grass is soaking wet with dew, and you can see the marks of feet here on the ledge."

Robinson swears no one came in the front door."

"It was a big man, Geoffrey—a very strong man," said Hallam, softly. "John Malcolm was no weakling yet his back is snapped like a piece of kindling. And there's no sign of any fight."

Saville's head was heavy with bitterness. If he had followed his own judgment and stayed here. If he had insisted on Malcolm's telling him what he feared. And then Robinson, the butler, reappeared. He was close to collapse.

"Mr. Saville!" he cried breathlessly. "The watchman in the garden! He . . . he's been killed. He's lying there on the lawn—dead . . ."

The man had been strangled. They brought the body into the house and Hallam pointed out the marks on his throat. "Somebody stood behind him with very powerful hands and simply crushed the breath out of him. He couldn't have cried out." Hallam fumbled for a cigarette in his black robe. "This killer works silently, Geoffrey—and quickly. He has three to his credit tonight!"

MAJOR BOSTWICK, tugging furiously at his mustache, faced Mr. Salazar across the latter's desk in the study of the McAndrew's house. His right fist was clenched and he brought it down sharply on the mahogany desk top.

"We've got to get out of here!" he said, in a ragged voice.

Mr. Salazar regarded the end of one of the long chin cigars he smoked. "We'll do nothing of the sort, my friend," he drawled. "You can't be using your head very clearly to suggest such a thing. People may know that the girl came here to see us. If we skip out it will be as good as a confession of guilt. If we stay quietly here there is not one jot of evidence against us."

"But we've done our job!" Bostwick complained. "We've put the skids under Malcolm and his scheme. Let's get out before they connect us with that. Herman is a fool. He killed them both the same way. They're bound to tie them up."

"But not to us," said Mr. Salazar coolly, "unless we go so far as to confess by running out! And we haven't entirely put the skids under Malcolm's scheme, Major. You forget that he has an heir—and business associates."

"The daughter! Salazar, you don't mean . . . ?"

Mr. Salazar flicked the ash from his cigar. "It always puzzles me why men are so much more squeamish about dealing with women than they are with men," he said. "After all, a life is a life, Major."

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Bostwick turned away, tugging at his mustache. "I wish I'd never got mixed up in this business, Salazar. I wish it with all my heart," he said.

Mr. Salazar regarded him through narrowed eyes. "It might have been better," he said thoughtfully. "It might have been much better, Major."

SAVILLE and Jericho had taken the car to go back to the fair grounds to locate Mary Malcolm. The news had to be broken to her and it was a job Saville would have given a great deal to side-step, yet obviously it was his responsibility. Hallam had remained at the house with the dead men to await the arrival of the local police.

If anything, the gaiety at the fair grounds had increased to a higher pitch. The music of the jazz band seemed to grate on Saville's nerves now. He and Jericho elbowed their way through the crowd looking for Mary, a job that was like hunting for a needle in a haystack. There were dozens of girls in gypsy costume, and all of them masked. Saville racked his brains to try to remember what Mary's costume had been like, and could recall nothing except that it had been a red print of some kind—and everybody seemed to be wearing red prints.

Jericho took the north side of the grounds and Saville the south. About twenty minutes later they met.

"I couldn't spot her," said Jericho.

"Nor I," said Saville.

"And I didn't see any sign of David Hilary either. Suppose they could have gone on somewhere? I understand that there are always a lot of private parties on a night like this. She and Hilary may have gone to one of those."

Saville was biting his lower lip. "The hell of it is I don't know who her friends are. Battersea, the secretary chap would know—and he should be notified; but I haven't seen hide nor hair of him either."

They researched the fair grounds once more without finding any of the three people they sought. After that the only thing to do seemed to be to go back to the house. Mary would probably come directly there from any party she had gone to and Saville wanted to be there when she arrived. She and her father had been very close. It was going to be very tough for her to take.

They drove back to Malcolm's place. There was a State Trooper at the gate now who only admitted them after considerable argument. The house was brilliantly lighted as they drove up. Robinson admitted them and told them that the commanding officer of the State Police, Captain Matson, was in charge.

"Miss Malcolm? Has she come in?" Saville demanded.

"No, sir. She and Mr. Hilary are still missing."

They started down the hall and then Saville stopped abruptly. Sitting in a chair outside the study, his mouth hanging open like a gasping fish, the light shining against the thick lenses of his spectacles, was Leon Battersea, the secretary. When he saw Saville he tried to speak, failed to make any sound, tried again and managed to whisper weakly: "Isn't it ghastly!"

"When did you get back?" Saville demanded.

"Just—just a few moments ago. I walked back. I . . ."

"*You walked ten miles!*" asked Saville incredulously.

"Oh yes. I like to walk," said Leon

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Battersea, in a quavering voice. "The carnival bored me. It—it was such a lovely night, I . . ."

"Where is Mary?" Saville cut in.

"I—I don't know. The police were just asking me. She *was* at the fair grounds."

"Why do you say *'was'?*"

"W-why, Robinson told me you'd gone back to the fair grounds for her. I—I assumed when you came back without her that you hadn't found her."

"Where can she have gone?" Saville demanded. "I understand there are private parties tonight. Who are her friends?"

"T-there aren't any regular parties," said Battersea. "They just get organized on the spur of the moment. She didn't say anything about going anywhere else when we went to the fair grounds. In fact t-they said they wouldn't leave without hunting me up. When I decided to walk home I looked for her to tell her I was leaving, but I couldn't find her." Battersea swallowed hard. "She'll probably not turn up till two or three o'clock. These parties always last late."

"And you can't suggest where she might be?"

"I—I really can't."

"All right, Battersea," said Saville, his voice grim, "but there is something you can tell me. What is this wholesale butchery all about?"

"Goodness, Mr. Saville, you don't think I . . . ?"

"John Malcolm was afraid of this," said Saville, sternly. "That's why we came up to see him. He didn't think there was any danger tonight so he put off telling me what frightened him. Now it's too late for him to tell me! But you are his private secretary. You know what was bothering him. Why was he killed, Mr. Battersea?"

BATTERSEA moistened lips dry as parchment. "But I *don't* know, Mr. Saville. Really, I don't know. If Mr. Malcolm was frightened he didn't tell me."

"How long have you been with him?"

"Eleven years, and I never . . ."

"You've been with him eleven years," rasped Saville, savagely, "and you're trying to tell me you don't know what was in the air . . . why he was afraid?"

"It's the truth," said Battersea. "Mr. Malcolm was very secretive. He never . . ."

"You knew he had watchmen stationed outside!" Saville cut in. "Why?"

"Oh, they've always been there, Mr. Saville. There are cranks who . . ."

"Did Mr. Malcolm have any business enemies?" Saville's questions were fired with machine-gun rapidity.

"W-why, all men of his wealth and position have enemies; but to kill him in cold blood is so thoroughly . . ."

"Who is Marian Twig?"

Mr. Battersea was gasping for breath. "I—I never heard of her!"

"She was murdered tonight, too," Saville went on, relentlessly. "She was murdered by the same person who killed Mr. Malcolm. She had a check in her pocket from Mr. Malcolm for fifty dollars. Who is she?"

"I don't know! I swear I . . ."

"The check was dated yesterday," Saville kept hammering at him. "It is written in Mr. Malcolm's own handwriting. Where was he yesterday?"

Battersea passed a hand across his eyes. "Y-you'll have to let me think a m-minute, Mr. Saville. I—I . . ."

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"Good night, man! Surely you can remember as far back as yesterday! Was he at home all day? If he went out where did he go; who did he see? It shouldn't take any great effort to remember that!"

The corners of Battersea's mouth twitched spasmodically "I've got it!" he said, his voice cracking. "He went to Kingston in the afternoon. One of his business associates, Mr. Orville Ray, was on his way from Albany to New York. He stopped over trains in Kingston and had a conference with Mr. Malcolm."

"And you don't know who Marian Twig is?"

"I never heard of her."

"Where was that conference held?"

"I—I think Mr. Malcolm mentioned the Hotel De Witt. I—I couldn't swear."

"Why was he killed, Battersea?" Saville struck out again.

Battersea pounded his clenched fists on the arms of his chair. "I don't know! *I don't know!*" he shouted.

Saville looked at Jericho and the big red head shrugged. Battersea didn't look as though he could "give" any more.

"All right, Battersea," said Saville. "I want you to do one thing now. Get to the telephone and call up all the people you can think of who are friends of Mary's. If you can locate her and get her to the phone, I'll talk to her. Somebody may have seen her somewhere. Get on her trail if you can, even if you can't locate her. Report to me the moment you get a clue to her whereabouts."

Battersea heaved a sigh of relief. "At once," he agreed.

Saville watched him go down the hall, frowning. "A man who has been confidential secretary to another man for eleven years *ought to* know more than Battersea does," he said to Jericho.

CHAPTER VI

Lull Before the Storm

IT was hours later. The members of the Hunt Club sat in the library of John Malcolm's house. Saville, his face drawn and haggard, was pacing up and down the room with a long, restless stride, lighting one cigarette from the stub of the other. Jericho sat in a big arm chair, pipe clenched between his teeth, very methodically cleaning an automatic. Hallam sat in front of a small table, surrounded by a cold roast of beef, bottles of beer, cheeses, relishes, and a loaf of rye bread on a bread board. These had been supplied by Wu, the little Chinese, who stayed unobtrusively in one corner of the room waiting for orders.

Mary Malcolm had not returned as yet and it was nearly four. Nor had Battersea been able to locate her, although there were several parties going. The police under Captain Matson had been through the long, tedious questioning that is inevitable in a murder case, and he was frankly nowhere. Someone had swung over the garden wall, strangled the watchman, and then proceeded on into John Malcolm's study and done for him. There was no clue to that someone. In the end, Hallam had turned over to him the check he had found on Marian Twig, explaining quite frankly that he had intended to show it to Malcolm before he turned it over to the police. This took the case one step further, for Captain Matson knew that Marian Twig had been the public stenographer at the Hotel De Witt in Kingston.

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Evidently the check was for services rendered the day before.

"But fifty dollars for an afternoon's stenographic work?" Saville had protested.

"It was Malcolm's way," Battersea explained. "He seldom carried cash. He always paid by check, and lavishly. Fifty dollars was a very small item to John Malcolm."

The hotel was called. Miss Twig had gone to the carnival. They didn't know there of the tragedy and Matson determined not to tell them over the phone.

Saville was the one most worried about Mary, which was natural. Everyone else seemed to feel certain that she had gone on somewhere—perhaps to one of the numerous bars or eating places in Woodstock—and that she would turn up in due time. Saville, who would have to break the news to her when she came, found the strain of waiting almost unendurable.

Jericho was like a hound, straining at the leash. When it came to following a trail and fighting with the quarry at the end he was tops. But first he must be put on the trail, and it irked him that as yet there was not one clue to the murderer.

"The whole thing is nuts!" he exploded angrily. "Why should that guy in the mask have been dancing with the girl after she was dead? You said she had been killed some time before, Arthur. What do you make of it?"

Hallam cut himself a slice of very rare beef, spread a piece of rye bread with Stilton cheese, and leaned back.

"It's just a guess," he said, "but I think it was a question of alibis. The murderer had no alibi for the actual time the girl was killed. So he brought her to the fair, thinking that people would see her there, *dancing*, mind you. Later, when she was found dead, there would be dozens of witnesses to prove that she was alive early in the evening—which she was not! The murderer probably framed an alibi for the early evening."

"And how do you figure out the connection between that killing and these?"

Hallam munched contentedly on his beef. "Malcolm had a business conference yesterday, De Witt Hotel. Called in the girl—dictated something to her. Someone wanted to know what that something was. Nearly burned off her feet trying to get her to talk. Maybe she did—maybe she didn't. That's something we don't know. If she did, she took plenty of punishment first."

"But what could she have told anyone about Malcolm?"

Hallam shrugged. "We should know that very soon. If Orville Ray—he's the bird Malcolm had the confab with in Kingston—started up here as soon as Matson called him. He should be here some time within half an hour." Hallam picked up the carving knife and went to work on the beef once more.

"God, I can't stand this much longer!" Saville rapped suddenly. He was standing at one of the windows, watching the first glow of the rising sun. "She must have seen somebody by now who knows we're looking for her! Battersea called about twenty numbers!"

"All night parties don't mean anything to young people nowadays," said Hallam. "She'll be along."

BUT half an hour later, when Mr. Orville Ray's car came to a skidding halt in front of the door, Mary was still missing. Mr. Ray, busi-

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ness associate of Malcolm's was a stout, ruddy-faced man of fifty. Everything about him looked soft except his eyes, which were bright steel buttons.

"A dreadful business, gentlemen," he wheezed. "Dreadful: Poor old Malcolm, why only yesterday I . . ."

"It's about yesterday we specially wanted to talk to you, Mr. Ray," said Hallam. He was on his eighth bottle of beer. "You saw Mr. Malcolm yesterday and . . ."

"Saw him! I spent several hours with him. In the best of spirits he was. Excellent health. By Jove, I never saw him in better fettle."

"Quite," said Hallam dryly. "What I was trying to get at was what you talked about?"

Mr. Ray's eyes were not meeting Hallam's directly. "Why, business," he said. "Mr. Malcolm and I are both directors of a big oil company. We were talking over certain policies."

Hallam sighed. "It would be more fun if you'd tell the truth, Mr. Ray," he said, very mildly.

Ray's cheeks turned a dull brick red. "Look here, sir, I won't tolerate any such . . ."

"You see, Mr. Ray," said Hallam in the same weary voice, "We've had rather a night of it. So let's not play games with each other. You had a conference with Mr. Malcolm at which you called in a public stenographer, one Miss Twig. Miss Twig was paid fifty dollars for her services. I'm told that was Malcolm's way. It was probably his way to impress on Miss Twig that she was to be discreet. Were the policies of your oil company of such importance that someone would torture Miss Twig to find out what they were?"

Ray gasped.

"Torture her and then murder her?" asked Hallam mildly. "Because that's what happened."

The color had now drained from Ray's face so that it was white. "Dreadful, dreadful!"

"Would you like to tell me what you really talked about? Hallam inquired.

"I've told you," said Ray. "This oil company. . . ."

"You don't mind if I have another beef sandwich, do you?" drawled Hallam. "I always need strength to listen to fairy stories. If you make up your mind to tell me the truth, Mr. Ray, I'll be glad to listen. And I'll know that you're telling the truth when you can look directly at me when you talk."

"There's no reason why I should talk to you at all," Ray blustered. "I'll save my information for the police."

Hallam watched him placidly as he stomped toward the door.

"Just a minute!" It was Saville's harsh voice that checked the business man. "You're an old friend of the family, aren't you, Mr. Ray?"

"I went to college with John Malcolm," said Ray stiffly.

"Isn't it rather odd you haven't inquired about his daughter?"

Ray moistened his lips. "I was just going to have Robinson tell her that I had arrived. This is terrible for her, poor girl."

"You don't by any chance know where Robinson could find her, do you, Mr. Ray?"

"Why . . . why I suppose she's in her room, isn't she?" Ray was flustered.

"She is not," said Saville. "And we don't know where she is. She went to the carnival this evening and hasn't returned."

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"I'm glad I'm here to break the news to her," said Ray. "I am a sort of adopted uncle to Mary." He smiled nervously.

Saville turned away impatiently. His nerves were worn to the raw. "I can't stand this any longer," he said. "I'm going out to hunt for her."

Jericho bounced up out of his chair. "I'm with you," he said, slipping the automatic into a holster under his arm.

"I shall stay here," said Hallam, "on the chance that Mr. Ray may decide to tell me the truth."

The brick-red color was in Ray's cheeks again as he left the room, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER VII

Hallam Finds the Scent

SOME four hours later, Saville and Jericho returned, gray with fatigue. They had found no trace of Mary, but they had discovered Mr. David Hilary, her escort, drinking quite a large number of highballs in the local country club bar. Mr. Hilary was very angry, because Mary had left him early in the evening and never came back again. He was so angry at the time that he had poured a great quantity of whisky on the flames, and now he was far too drunk to be of any use. Somehow, he had got the idea through his handsome, blond head that John Malcolm was dead. He cried a great deal about it, and seemed to think if Mary hadn't run away and left him flat it would never have happened. It was Wu, the little Chinese, who put him to bed. It was Wu who had hot food and coffee waiting for Saville and Jericho.

Matson, the police captain, was back, and he now shared Saville's fears over Mary Malcolm's absence. An alarm was broadcast which had state troopers all over the country on the lookout for her. Hallam finally persuaded Saville and Jericho to take some rest by telling them that he had slept the entire four hours during their absence—a statement which had no basis in fact whatsoever. Hallam had been thinking.

"The moment any kind of clue or report turns up, I'll wake you," he promised Saville. "If something has really happened to Mary, you won't find her by wandering around the countryside. We'll have to get our noses down to some kind of scent."

Hallam had worked out a pattern for himself in those four hours. Malcolm had some sort of business deal on the fire which enemies of his wished to prevent going through. Ray knew what that deal was, but he wasn't talking. Marian Twig, unfortunately, must also have had an inkling. The enemy, whoever they might be, had tried to get her to talk. This meant something in Orville Ray's favor. If he was one of the enemy there would have been no need to extract information from Marian Twig. Ray could have given it to them. No, Mr. Ray had some other reason for withholding information.

The next question was, did the enemy get their information from Miss Twig in the long run, or had she kept her mouth shut to the finish? The fact that Malcolm had been subsequently murdered made it look at first glance as though she *had* talked. But Hallam toyed with the notion that she hadn't. He liked to think she hadn't. If she hadn't, it might mean the enemy had not dared risk going on without the information they wanted and had been forced to kill Malcolm to prevent his doing—whatever it was he planned to do.

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Miss Twig loomed so large in this pattern that Hallam decided he had to know more about her. So while the others slept Hallam borrowed one of Malcolm's cars and drove to the Hotel De Witt in Kingston.

There Hallam walked calmly up to the desk and asked for Miss Twig.

"I have some typing I want to get done," he said blandly.

The clerk was in a dither of excitement. "Haven't you heard?" he cried. "She was murdered! Last night!"

Hallam was properly shocked. He craved details.

"She was killed at the carnival in Woodstock last night," said the clerk. "Somebody choked her to death."

Hallam was gratified to hear this, though he kept the shocked expression on his face. Matson had not given out the information that the police knew she had been killed long before she reached the fair grounds.

"She was a fine typist," said Hallam, in a wistful voice.

"The best! And a swell kid," said the clerk. "All the best people had her do work for them. Why, only day before yesterday John Malcolm hired her—gave her fifty bucks he was so pleased with her work."

"Is that so!" said Hallam. News of the Malcolm murder was not public property as yet.

"And last night, just before she went to the carnival, the rich guy who's rented the McAndrew place sent for her. She went up there in her carnival dress. The police say he was the last one to see her alive. She did some work for him and went away, and after that nobody knows what happened."

"The McAndrew house?" queried Hallam. "I don't seem to know who has rented it."

"A man named Salazar. I don't know anything about him. But he told the cops Marian was a swell stenographer. Gee, it's a terrible thing to happen."

Hallam agreed that it was terrible, and presently made his escape. After a few inquiries he got complete directions to the McAndrew place. He reached it about twenty minutes later. There was a thoughtful expression on his face as he rang the door bell. He was thinking that he was probably being a damned fool.

A wooden-faced servant opened the door. "I'd like to speak to Mr. Salazar," said Hallam.

"I'll see if he's in," said the servant, and went away.

PRESENTLY he returned and announced that Mr. Salazar *was* at home. And all the time Hallam was thinking that it was odd, such a formal household, that he hadn't been asked his name.

Mr. Salazar was in his study, sitting behind his desk. He smiled his white toothy, unctuous smile. Hallam stood looking down at him through his steel-rimmed spectacles, and he felt a strange little tightening of the muscles around his heart. Suddenly he knew he was facing a very dangerous man. Suddenly he knew he had been right on two points. He had been right in believing that he was on the trail of the murderer; and he had been right in thinking he was a fool.

"And what can I do for you, my dear sir?" asked Mr. Salazar, smoothly.

"I'm afraid I'm intruding," said Hallam, apologetically. "I know the police have been to you already." At the word "police," a glitter came into Mr. Salazar's little black eyes and then vanished. "But I am very much concerned with the mystery of Marian

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Twig's murder," Hallam went on. "She was a friend of mine."

"A shocking affair," said Mr. Salazar, reaching for the black humidor. "Cigar? You don't mind if I do? I was immeasurably shocked when I learned of her death. She did some work for me only a few hours before she was killed." Mr. Salazar shuddered. "It makes one feel very close—unpleasantly close—to violence!"

"I know what you mean," said Hallam. "I wanted to ask you if she happened to mention whom she was going with to the carnival."

"Not a word," said Mr. Salazar. "But there *was* a young man waiting in the car outside."

"Did you get a look at him?"

Mr. Salazar looked unhappy about it. "I saw him," he admitted, "but he was in carnival attire. And he was wearing a mask . . . a mask which I should say had been fashioned after a conception of Cyrano."

"She didn't mention his name?"

"Unfortunately, no."

Hallam sighed. "I had hoped there might have been something in her conversation that would give us some clue. Well, thank you for giving me your time, Mr. Salazar."

"Not at all, Mr. Hallam."

There was a funny silence after that. Hallam stood looking unblinkingly at Salazar, and Salazar's hand suddenly crept under the edge of his desk.

"You know, that's very odd," said Hallam. "I have never mentioned my name and yet you know it."

Mr. Salazar's little black eyes were two points of fire.

"It *is* odd," he said, in a tight voice. "And I wouldn't reach for that gun if I were you, Mr. Hallam. You're already covered."

"It isn't a gun," said Mr. Hallam, very quietly. "It's my cigarette case." He took it out, extracted a cigarette, and lit it. Then he looked over his shoulder. Herman Schott, the man with the close cropped blond hair, was standing with his back to the door, and there was a gun in his hand. At the same moment Major Bostwick appeared at the French doors. Hallam inhaled deeply on his cigarette. He was looking straight at Mr. Salazar.

"Is this the room where you killed her?" he asked evenly.

What is the prize, that murder is so cheap? What has happened to lovely Mary Malcolm? While Saville rages and Jericho fumes, Hallam has unerringly tracked down the killers. But what will that avail? Exciting developments are coming in next week's thrilling installment.

There's not much chance to exercise
While riding on a train.
But we just eat, then alkalize.
And never have a pain
ACID INDIGESTION
O DEAR! MY HEAD IS ACHING SO. I THINK I'LL HIKE FOR HOME -
I'D TAKE AN ALKA-SELTZER, FLO, - IT ALWAYS CLEARS MY DOME
HEADACHE
Be Wise— Alkalize
Alka-Seltzer
Alka-Seltzer Makes a sparkling alkalizing solution containing an analgesic (acetyl salicylate). You drink it and it gives prompt, pleasant relief for Headaches, Sour Stomach, Distress after Meals, Colds and other minor Aches and Pains
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AT ALL DRUGGISTS
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White Pants

By

Edgar Franklin

"Hey, you! Where's them pants?" he gasped

A Drama in Three Short Acts, Featuring Danny Howe, Twenty-One and Unjailed, and the Widow O'Hara, Who Washed Clothes for a Living

THIS is Chapter One, which has to do with Danny Howe, a rather rat-faced person twenty-one years old, for some obscure reason still out of jail.

Came the end of the fourth race and Danny Howe finished with his mad screaming, resisted the impulse to stand happily on his head, and finally went to see a man, who adjusted everything nicely on the spot. After that Danny took a taxi all the way home from the track, crossing skinny shanks encased in rather dubious white trousers and whistling tune after tune.

It will be deduced that life today was satisfactory to Danny Howe, and in-

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deed it was. Dumb clucks, as you doubtless understand, are put on this earth to be trimmed and chiseled—and who would deny that Mrs. O'Hara was the dumbest of dumb clucks? Most certainly not Danny Howe, who meant indeed to prove it.

In the gloaming he reached his humble home and, meeting his sister Sadie, herself just returning from work, and hearing her comments on the five-spot he tossed so nonchalantly to the driver, he told his sister Sadie to go to the devil and peel her own onions.

We now come to Chapter Two, which concerns Mrs. O'Hara, widow of the late Patrick. Mrs. O'Hara was two hundred pounds of, mostly, muscle, and since the late Patrick had carried no insurance to speak of, she made a fair living these days by cleansing the garments which others had soiled.

She stood this morning in the hot, early sunshine of her small back yard and great beads of honest sweat rolled down her vast, unintelligent countenance as she ploughed up and down the old zinc washboard. Then she straightened and dashed off some of the beads, the while shaking drops from her hands. Her eyes narrowed, her mighty bosom heaved emotionally, for here came Danny Howe in person, galloping as if on his way to a fire. And she had a thing or two to say to that one!

Usually so dapper, he was not dapper at all just now. Danny, in point of fact, looked as if he had leaped from bed, dragged on shirt and trousers and, even while buttoning them, had made the run here in nothing flat!

"Hey, you! Where's them pants!" he gasped.

"On yer bandy legs, I'd say," Mrs. O'Hara retorted, a cutting edge to her husky contralto. "And now, me bucko," said she, with her hands on her hips, "I'll just have a word wid you about this matter of Lady Lulu. You were in such a rush last night when you yelled at me in passin'—"

"I mean, them white pants!" Danny broke in, looking around quite wildly. "Them pants that was in the wash Sadie brought over here this morning. There was two pair of 'em. One was a'ready in the laundry basket and Sadie must 'a' took the other pair offen the chair beside my bed while I was still sleepin' an' stuck 'em in the wash, too, and—say, I ast you: *where's them pants?*"

Always pleasantly informal, he plunged both grimy hands into the sudsy tub and pawed about. He brought up no more than one pillowcase and some pink lingerie.

"I have no doubt," Mrs. O'Hara said, with considerable asperity, "that presently yer high-hat sister Sadie will drive up in her third-hand flivver and drop the old suitcase wid yer wash in it over me front fence—an' then drive grandly on t' work, Danny, with never a word. Indeed, yes! Since she has the job in the department store she's much too fine a lady t' be stoppin' to pass the time o' day wid the likes o' me, when she leaves her wash. Three weeks runnin', now, she's done that same thing. But be that as it may, Danny Howe, it's about Lady Lulu I'll be asking a pointed question or two now, so—"

"If that's where Sadie usually leaves the wash she's left it a'ready, on account of she was gone from the house before I woke up!" Danny puffed.

And he turned and ran across the flower beds, straight to the picket fence out front. Mrs. O'Hara, breathing noisily, watched him peer about and then suddenly dive at a spot near the

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front gate. He called back relievedly: "O. K. I found the bag. I got it."

Mrs. O'Hara saw him sit down, squarely on the petunia seedlings, and jerk the elderly suitcase to his lap. She saw him yank it open and claw through the contents until he had fished out two pairs of white duck trousers. She saw him run hurried fingers through all the pockets of both the pairs.

After that Danny Howe sat scowling for a full half minute, but at last he crammed back all the clothes, brought the suitcase with him and tossed it to the rear porch.

"I guess she must 'a' went through the pockets before she put 'em in the wash," he reported. "There was some papers I didn't want t' get soaked, see? A letter about a job and a—a letter from Father Kelly, recommending me . . . Well, I gotta see what Sadie done with them papers. So long, Mrs. O'Hara."

"So long, yer eye!" Mrs. O'Hara responded vigorously. "Stay where y'are. I wanta know more about them thirty bucks I give you yesterday to bet on Whitelegs at twenty t' one!"

About Danny Howe was ever the Chesterfieldian touch. "Say, lissen, y' dumb-faced cluck!" he cried. "We went into all that last night. I had your thirty bucks an' twenty o' my own, an' I went t' the track t' paste it all on Whitelegs' nose. Okay. An' then this party I've known for years comes from the paddock an' tells me he has it straight, how it's fixed to pull Whitelegs an' Lady Lulu is set to take the race instead—an' payin' forty to one, as I told you. So I done what you'd 'a' done, what any person not a nut would 'a' done. I bet the wad on Lady Lulu—an' the poor goat practically dropped dead at the post."

"So I seen by the papers. An' Whitelegs won by four lengths. So now kindly tell me *why*—"

"Hold it, Mrs. O'Hara!" Danny snapped, and it was obvious that he could bear little more. "I admit I done different from what you told me. I admit I lost your thirty bucks for you. Okay. Because I was too wise ain't no reason why *you* should lose your money. I'm absolutely on the level, Mrs. O'Hara, so here's what I'm doing: I still got forty dollars in the savings bank. As soon as I see Sadie I'm drawing out thirty o' that an' handing it to you. What do you think of that? Can I do more?"

"If I ever see it, mebbe not," Mrs. O'Hara conceded grudgingly. "Only *why* the devil, when I told you so special and particular t' put them thirty bucks on Whitelegs, why did you—"

"Listen, Mrs. O'Hara," Danny Howe said patiently, and one could almost see the faint halo behind his head. "No matter how good we mean, the best of us makes mistakes sometimes. How I had it figured, I'd be bringing you back better'n a grand an' handing it to you—an' just seeing your face when you got it would 'a' been all I asked. Because that's how I am. The way things worked out I'll have ten bucks left in the world, but you won't be nothing out of pocket. I gotta go now."

He went, hurrying out by the front gate without a backward glance and speeding off downstreet—and this, of course, brings us to Chapter Three, which treats of Mrs. O'Hara alone.

Mrs. O'Hara stood there watching him, her moist, red face an utter blank. She saw Danny putting on more and more speed as he approached the corner and finally, as he turned, breaking into

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a headlong run. Still she stood there, meditatively scratching her head, with still no hint of expression on a single feature—just waiting, because with a Danny Howe you never can tell, and she wouldn't have put it past him to turn around and come tearing back here.

Two full minutes, though, and Mrs. O'Hara relaxed and started for the door of her very modest home. Ten minutes to the department store, ten minutes more for the battle with Sadie, supposing that she wasn't busy and the battle started immediately, and another ten minutes to get back here. There was time. It would take Mrs. O'Hara fully eight minutes to walk to the bank, which, by the mercy of the saints, was in the opposite direction; and she might well have to wait another five on line before making her deposit She had been a lone widow-woman these many years and much of the time she talked to herself for company.

"Well, may the pair o' them claw the eyes from each other!" she wished charitably, as she closed and locked the door and, from under her lumpy mattress, extracted her prettily bulging bankbook. "A dumb-faced cluck, the little rat called me! Well—what matter?" she said, with a light sigh. "What matters the face, so there's activity behind the same? . . . Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, one hundred!" she murmured, counting the bills. "And even so," she mused soberly, "it must 'a' been second sight or somethin' was guiding me, for I didn't have their dirty wash back in the suitcase an' the suitcase back by the fence wid more'n two minutes to spare before the lad come gallopin' in . . . Two hundred an' forty an' sixty an' eighty an' three hundred dollars . . . Would I like to have one look at that Whitelegs horse before leavin', bless the grand heart of him! . . . An' sixty an' eighty an' five hundred dollars . . . An' back to County Clare in one o' them swell tourist ships . . . Five hundred an' twenty an' forty an' sixty an' eighty an'—six hundred dollars!" Mrs. O'Hara paused and scowled. "What did the dirty little crook do with the other thirty, I wonder?" she muttered; but as she stuffed bills and bank-book into her bosom she turned magnanimous. "Aw, lave him have it! Sooner or later the divil'll catch up wid his own!" said Mrs. O'Hara as she draped her shawl over her head.

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"Look out for tricks," warned Lumbard

Loot Island

By Tom Roan

CHAPTER I

Murder

SHEETS of Alabama rain drove out of the sullen midnight sky, beating across Lonesome Swamp in occasional blasts of a sharp wind, and falling like shots of guns on the high, many-gabled roof of the huge old stone house there on a rocky point of the little island.

Killers, Even the Cleverest of Them, Always Make a Fatal Slip. That Is Why G-Men McGee and Lumbard Were Exploring the Treacherous Alabama Swamplands

Now and then the moon broke through the scudding clouds sweeping up from the southwest. At odd intervals lightning flickered across the wet jungle and far away, and yet it was strong enough to light the big upstairs room under one of the south

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gables where Shorty McGee and Big John Lumbard, the two federal agents, were waiting and watching, listening for something that they had heard a few minutes before, knowing that it would be repeated in due time.

After endless minutes of waiting, it came again, a low, vibrating sound rising from the black lanes of stagnant water to southward. It was like a grumbly moan, rising slobberingly, growing higher and higher, becoming keen, shockingly shrill. It held at the topmost note for two or three seconds, then fell away in a wild fit of mocking laughter, and ended at last in a fierce, echoing whisper.

"Good mechanics," whispered Lumbard. "A siren of some sort. Carried in a boat, no doubt. Enough to scare the fire out of the devil, let alone these simple farmers along the swamp rim."

Shorty McGee nodded, and mumbled something about a cigarette that he would like to smoke. Both men were conscious of a strange, unholy tension there in the lonesome old house. It would have been a weird place even in a bright, sunshiny day.

Both had agreed at the beginning that only a madman could have wanted a house in this jungle land of gnarled old cypress trees lifting bone-like arms to the sky; this swamp where Spanish moss hung low, ballooning from every limb, where reptiles of every shape and size stole through the slimy green ooze and fever and chills ran rampant every day in the year—and that was to say nothing of the dreadful isolation and the stark-mad lonesomeness of it all.

With the greatest quiet, coming like thieves under the cover of night, they had reached the place long after darkness had settled. A big canoe laden with supplies had brought them, their paddles moving stealthily. In the center of it, crouched over two long-eared bloodhounds, had sat a huge, black-as-midnight Negro, a trusty from one of the prison farms—and a wizard with his two dogs. Old Rip was down in the stone-floored basement now, keeping his hounds quiet. A fearless Negro serving life imprisonment for the murder of one of his kind, he had come to McGee and Lumbard with the highest recommendation his big, fat-jowled warden could possibly give him.

"The best in the shop," the man had told McGee and Lumbard. "Knows more about bloodhounds than any three white men I know, and there's not a nerve in his body. He'll work wonders with old Jenny and Jerry, those two hounds he's taking with him, and you can bank your life on him. We send him all over the state with those dogs."

Working quietly, the canoe had been unloaded, drawn out of the black water, and carefully concealed there in one of the old out buildings north of the main house. Old Rip had selected the basement as the ideal place for him to keep the dogs.

"They won't even growl down there," he had told McGee and Lumbard. "When I whispers to Jenny an' ol' Jerry they lis'ens to all I got to say, white folks."

He was keeping his word. In addition, Old Rip had a sawed-off shotgun and a big .45 Colt down there with him. McGee and Lumbard were taking no chances. Both young, both dressed in stout corduroy, they had come into this unforgettable hell-hole on a half-wild tip wrung from the thick, gibbering lips of a drunken little doctor one night in a road house dive near Birmingham. Even Washington had doubted it.

Lonesome Swamp was not the place

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any one would expect to find Crash Finnegan and his band of international swindlers, bank robbers, confidence men of the highest order of gangdom. Their last job had been in Seattle, far up there in the Northwest, and even now all the old hide-outs of the West were being watched for members of the self-styled Versatile Seven.

SITTING there in this old house listening to the rain and keeping as quiet as mice seemed downright foolish when one looked at it too closely. Even the warden who had loaned them the dogs and Old Rip had smiled behind his hand. But one grew used to things like that in the Department of Justice. A tip was a tip, one of the many thousands of things you had to play, running down this one and that one, the most of them entirely worthless and heart-breaking at the end of long, tiring weeks of sleepless nights and man-killing work.

But there was something here, something queer and out of place out there in the dark, gloomy world of stagnant water ridden with fever and creeping and crawling death. There was something in that noise. Neither McGee nor Lumbard could picture Crash Finnegan doing anything like that. It was not like Crash. Crash belonged to the quiet, the wise-as-an-owl-and-silent-as-a-serpent kind of human rats long sought by the government. That infernal noise was too much like a warning.

It came again, closer than before, fiercer. The old house with its one-time elaborate furnishings seemed to tremble. There was something hellishly ghostly about it, something that smacked of some primitive monster slowly making its way toward the house. McGee winced, and fondled the gun lying there on his lap. He was a short, stocky man of twenty-eight, round-faced, freckled, pug-nosed, his hair rusty-red. He looked at Lumbard as the lightning flashed again. Lumbard's face was hard, grimly set, the gray eyes narrow.

"Gets you, doesn't it?" whispered McGee. "Especially me, a Brooklynite who never prowled around in such outlandish places, eh?"

Lumbard nodded. He arose, and stole to the tall window, trying to look out. The rain pattered against the rattly old panes. A thin, fog-like cloud beat through a crack in one of the broken squares of glass. It was cold, sickly cold and clammy like the infernal swamp stretching away out there in the darkness. He winced as McGee stepped up noiselessly behind him and took hold of his arm.

"There's somebody in the house," whispered McGee. "I'll swear I heard the faintest squeak from those old stairs down the hall."

"All old houses squeak at night," whispered Lumbard.

"If they have somebody living in them and tramping up and down the stairs all day, yes," nodded McGee. "Vibration of footsteps cause it, but what if they stand empty for years?"

IT was something to think about. They stood listening. Suddenly Lumbard wanted to laugh. It was so confoundedly ridiculous. Here they were, miles away from anybody, following a half-tip from a worthless, drunken sot in a road house. Lumbard remembered the warden's smile. He remembered the one word of decoded message from Washington. IMPOSSIBLE. Now, here he was with McGee, and McGee had been only lukewarm to the idea in the first place.

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Old houses at night always gave one a queer feeling. It was, possibly, the primitive in man. One dreaded dark, musty old rooms where rats and mice darted out from hidden corners and went slipping like ghostly shadows across the floor or up the paneled walls. As yet, the two investigators had had no time to inspect the place.

All they had been able to tell with an occasional blade of light from their flashlights was that the place was gloomy. Half the rooms were like barns. The man who had erected the house had been nothing short of a nut. That was plain.

Out there below the window on a plot of weed-grown ground surrounded by a once-white fence was a graveyard, the tombstones showing like short, shrouded figures in a huddle every time the lightning flashed or the moon broke through the clouds.

That hellish noise was about the only thing they could cling to, and maybe the old house magnified that a thousand times. Now it was gone, leaving only the occasional lashing of the trees.

McGee left the window, but he came back. He took Lumbard firmly by the arm. There was something cold and angered and alarmed in his voice as he again whispered:

"There's somebody in this house besides us and Old Rip and those damned hounds, John. I feel it. It's not just the creeps. *There's somebody here.* Ease over near the door to the hall."

It was only to please him that Lumbard followed him. He had never seen Shorty McGee like this. They reached the door. It was cracked open. They stood there for all of a minute. Moans and groans of the wind came to them. They heard an old shutter swinging slowly back and forth on rusty hinges.

The thing gave off the faint cry of a baby fussing in its crib in a dark room. They heard the squeak of a rat, the quick, racing patter of little feet, and another squeak. Something writhed along the floor, making a soft, *whish-shish* of sound.

They could not tell what it was. It was so slithery and snake-like it must have been a snake hurrying along after the rats. Whatever it was, it was enough to send chills down the strongest man's back, but it was certainly not a human being slipping about there in the bitter darkness.

They were about to turn away when it came to them. It was fierce, shrill, terrible, the last, shocking, agonized wail of terror from a dying man's throat. It came rushing up the stairs, echoing through the whole house.

"Lawd! *Oh, Lawd!*" it said, and then ended with a gurgling, whistling intake of breath.

It was Old Rip. Lumbard and McGee knew that. There was no time now for further silence. No use to wait for morning before exploring the old house from top to bottom. With the noise of mules, their flashlights going, they darted through the doorway. With the old stairs shaking and rattling, they scurried down them, passed through a huge dining room, and came to the door leading to the basement. The door was open, just as they had left it. With their lights still going, guns in their hands and ready, they literally flew down the stairs.

One flash of their lights revealed the ghastly picture. Old Rip was off of his folding cot. He lay flat on his back on the cold stones of the floor. His arms were thrown out on either side of him. His eyes were wide open, two white, black-dotted orbs glaring up at the cobwebbed ceiling, his throat torn

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from ear to ear as if a lion had caught him one quick, long-clawed stroke and had killed him without another blow. Beyond him, chained to the wall, lay the two bloodhounds.

Jenny had already quit twitching.

"Get out of here—*quick!*" gasped Lumbard, hoarsely. "There's something in here, Shorty!"

CHAPTER II

"Shove Up Your Hands!"

SOBBING, gasping for breath, Lumbard pushed McGee up the stairs ahead of him. They were staggering, grasping for this and that to support them when they reached the head of the basement stairs. There in the old-fashioned dining room with its high, paneled walls, Shorty McGee went down. He went down stupidly, like a man dog-drunk. Lumbard stumbled over him, dropped to his knees, and then stumbled up, dragging the half-limp McGee to his feet.

Somehow, rocking this way and that, crashing into the old table and upsetting chairs, they reached the lower hall. It seemed a mile to the front door. It seemed to take an hour to open it. They blundered out on the rotting front porch, and sagged back against the wall, slumping down there in huddled figures where the wind was blowing another harsh, cooling blast from the swamp. Shorty McGee had lost both his flashlight and his gun.

"Sleeping gas of some kind," finally gasped Lumbard. "In five seconds more it would have had us. They gave it to Old Rip and the dogs before—before they went in to kill them."

"Yeah—I—know." McGee's voice was thick, jerky. "Not—the first time—Crash has used—such things."

"They're still here," warned Lumbard, shaking his head violently and trying to clear it of an awful swimming sensation.

"Sure—you watch." McGee's head bobbed, rolling to one side on his limp neck. "I'll be—all right—in a minute."

They were in a little recess there against the wall. That they were being watched Lumbard was certain. About the only thing that was saving them now, he reasoned, was the fact that the killers of Old Rip and the dogs were trying to get into a position where they could be sure of themselves. He held his gun ready, watching, still shaking his head. Whatever the stuff that had been used in the basement had been powerful. Probably lethal gas at that, and the killers had come in wearing gas masks.

Lumbard slapped Shorty McGee's face, and shook him, trying to bring him out of it. The danger was too great to sit there like this. At any second a blazing gash of fire might lurch out at them. Suddenly there was a sound of shot, but it came from somewhere around the point of the island to Lumbard's left. It was followed in a minute by the jack-braying, hyena-screaming cry, and everything was still except for the wind and the rain.

It was like that when morning came, though the wind died away at dawn, the clouds parted. It was almost clear when broad daylight came to the swamp. The sun finally came, stealing up over the glistening wet trees, but nothing could wipe away the perpetual gloom of the swamp. It was there, stretching away like some great monster, a great den peopled with all manner of danger, its dark lanes of water streaking shadows, the hum of its poisonous insects rising, its deadly mocca-

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sins crawling or lying in wait for a victim beside the green pools.

McGee and Lumbard had never been in such a place. Both were still a little sick when dawn found them there hugging the safety of the porch. The night had been their worst nightmare, a night of breathless waiting and watching. The words of the warden who had loaned them Old Rip and the dogs came back to them.

"You fellows have probably been around a great deal more than I'll ever be," he had told them, grimly. "You've seen a lot, heard a lot. Big city fellows will probably only laugh, or would if I talked to them, but there's hell in old Lonesome. When a prisoner gets away and gets into it, we usually let him go. If he's too bad, we watch the rims of the swamp. It's the hell-hole of Alabama."

IT had not seemed reasonable. John Lumbard had plainly told Shorty McGee that there was a shade too damned much melodrama tied to it. It was simply a lowland when one passed it by train, old as the very hills, of course, but nothing to get alarmed about. They knew better now. The fellows back in Washington—if they ever saw Washington again—could laugh about it if they wanted to, they could ask the usual question, "What were you ducks drinking to come back with a tale like that?"

"And we'll tell them to go to hell," growled Lumbard.

They opened the old windows of the basement, looked in, and saw that the body of Old Rip and the two hounds were lying there just as they had left them, but they were not going to venture into that basement again until it had a chance to air out. It was the same with the confounded house. They opened windows and doors, and then discovered their canoe was gone.

"That means," nodded Lumbard there on the porch, "that the gang we're up against have seen to it that we're not going to leave the island."

"They had the same thing in mind last night," agreed McGee. "We were slated for the same thing that happened to Old Rip and his dogs. Rip must have been a hard man to put to sleep."

"Or they were in a shade too much of a hurry, yes."

They were soon searching the house. They searched it from top to bottom. There was no indication that anybody had lived in it for years. Dust covered the old furniture. In the living room, with its giant fireplace, Civil War generals looked down from their cobwebbed picture frames, some of them painted by artists little short of masters. In the dining room fine old silver, black and tarnished with the years, remained in its place. A fortune in china was in the cupboards gathering the dust.

The original owner of the place had been a rich man. That was patent. All about the house there were rock-walled gardens. Further back on the island there was a barn, its walls made of the same heavy stones as the house. Having had breakfast on some of the tinned foods they had brought along, Lumbard and McGee—each now carrying a rifle—set out at last to inspect the entire island. They moved warily, knowing that they were being watched.

It was around the point of the island, in the direction they had heard the shot, that they came upon the body of a man lying at the edge of a stagnant pool. Somebody had shot him through the head, killing him instantly. Lumbard whistled when he rolled the body over on its back. McGee stared with

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his mouth wide open. It seemed a minute before either of them could speak.

"Phil Bailey!" finally gasped Lumbard. "Wanted in Seattle with Crash for that last bank job!"

McGee had no answer for him. The amazement in his face seemed to have stolen his voice. All he could do was to stare at the body there in front of them.

There was no mistake about it. Phil Bailey had, at last, reached the end of his rope, had ended his long career of murder, robbery, and general damnation to mankind. The old, ragged red scar was there on his forehead, the thick-lipped mouth snarled open, the thin streak of gray in his hair, arching back from above the left eye to almost the back of his head.

Who killed Phil—and why? That was the question now. It gave the damned swamp even more mystery and danger. Certainly it had not been one of Crash Finnegan's gang. None of Crash's gang would have rubbed out Phil. None of Crash's gang would have dared to mix lead with this hardened outlaw. His record was a record almost as long, as bitter and cruel as Crash Finnegan's.

Lumbard and McGee were still staring when two men slipped out of the bushes just behind them. Two old-fashioned rifles slipped forward. They pressed their muzzles against McGee's and Lumbard's backs. A low, rasping voice spoke quickly.

"Shove up your hands!"

CHAPTER III

Prisoners

"DROP them guns you're totin'. Turn 'round slow. We've got you. I ain't no man to fool you, and I mean it, too."

Slowly, carefully, Lumbard and McGee released their weapons, allowing them to drop. They turned. They turned slowly, with all caution, knowing that the owner of that voice would shoot them down without another word of warning. They looked into two harsh, roughly bearded faces and two pairs of eyes as gray as slate.

The two men wore overalls, rough shoes, striped shirts of the homespun vintage, and battered hats. Beyond them others had stood up in the bushes, their guns ready, faces tense. All told, there were five of the men, and then the bushes parted a little farther away. A tall, blue-eyed girl, amazingly pretty in spite of rough dress of blue cotton and a ragged hat on the back of her blond head, stepped forward with a rifle in her hands. At a glance Lumbard saw that all the weapons were old and badly battered.

"We're plumb tuckered out with your company," the man in front of Lumbard was going on, his moving chin streaked with tobacco juice. "Heap more'n tired of it. Poke your hands a little higher. If we don't feed you to a red-eyed alligator, it ain't goin' to be my fault. No, by gum, it ain't."

"Don't be in a hurry, Pa." The girl had come up behind the old man. "I still say that these men don't look like the regular pack that's been pestering us."

Lumbard saw at once that he was not dealing with any of Crash Finnegan's gang. These people were swamp people, farmers without a doubt. It never occurred to him to think of them as anything else.

"Easy with your guns, fellows." Lumbard spoke gently, wanting no undue excitement in a dangerous situation like this. "You probably think

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you know who we are, but you don't. We're strangers here in the swamp. Just came in last night—"

"We didn't ax you when you come!" rasped the man in front of him. "I'm Jedd Crow, if that means anything to you. The note I writ—or had my Anna write—two days ago an' hung up on the barn—well, it meant what it said. You was told to get out. We ain't folks to fool you, we Swamp Rabbits ain't. You had your chance, you didn't take it. We ain't no hands to go to the law, like I said on that note Anna writ. We 'tend to our own damn business until smart city fellas like you come along—"

"Maybe I could explain." A glance at the rifle in the old man's hands had told Lumbard the weapon was cocked. Besides, he saw that it was a hair-triggered weapon. A touch of that gnarled finger there in the trigger-guard would send a bullet smashing through him. "At least, you people might give us a chance by telling us who you're looking for. We're not in here with any gang, if that is what you mean."

"Give them a chance, Pa." Again the girl was speaking. "It won't make any difference whether you shoot them now or five minutes from now."

"What'd you come here for?" demanded the old man, boring the muzzle of his rifle a trifle harder against the pit of Lumbard's stomach. "If you lie, I'll catch you."

"Maybe," ventured Lumbard, thankful that at least McGee was keeping quiet, "we came here looking for a gang. If that is the case, you haven't anything to fear from us."

"FEAR from you?" The older man's snagged, tobacco-stained teeth glinted in a grin. "I ain't skeered of a red-eyed 'gator if I've got this old gun on 'im. Talk turkey, mister. We ain't got all day, even if my boy Tripp is up there on the point watching with his fine new gun."

"We're federal agents." That came from McGee. At the moment Lumbard could have knocked him down. "Members of the Department—"

"Rivinooers, Jedd!" exclaimed one of the three men who had halted there behind the two men in front of McGee and Lumbard. "Plain mad dogs—an' they've got the crust to admit it."

"So that's it, huh!" The rifle muzzle tightened against Lumbard's stomach. "Swamp paddlers, huh! An' you come here lookin' for trouble. First it's one bunch, then the next. We mighta knowed. Rivinooers!"

"You don't understand. We—"

"Oh, yeah, we do!" Somebody laughed, cutting Lumbard short when he started to speak. "We Swamp Rabbits know what to do, too. Bust their bellies open, Jedd, an' get it done with. I'd like to pop one of 'em, m'se'f."

"Wait a minute!" The girl was speaking again. "This is no place for it. Tie them up. Don't do something in a hurry that you're apt to be sorry for. We—"

"That's right," cut in Lumbard, speaking directly to the girl now. "We're not revenue officers, Miss—er—Crow. We have nothing to do with that angle of the government's business."

"That's what the last buzzard told my daddy!" chuckled one of the men. "Pa killed the polecat while the other polecats what come back with 'im tried to 'rest Pa."

It took carefully worded argument to keep from being killed right there on the spot. McGee must have realized that he had made a blunder. He was silent while Lumbard argued, and

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Lumbard argued almost directly to the girl. At last, in final desperation, he told the girl why he had come to the swamp. He told them of the murder in the old house. He told them of hearing the shot around the point of the island here, and of the finding of the body of Phil Bailey there just behind him now.

"If it's any news to you," nodded Jedd Crow, grimly, keeping his rifle's muzzle buried against the pit of Lumbard's stomach, "it was me what shot the two-legged 'gator devil. I woulda maybe got me another'n or two, but the light was too pore to shoot by last night. Keep your hands up, you!"

Again it took arguing. Lumbard understood now. There were moonshiners among these men. Possibly they were making the traditional corn whiskey of Alabama. Any officer to these men spelled rank poison. The men there behind Jedd Crow were determined that McGee and Lumbard were going to die. It was the girl that kept arguing and finally saved them.

SHE came forward, setting her rifle down beside a little bush. With a thoroughness that was astounding, she searched Lumbard. She searched him from the top of his head to his feet, and, finally, it was the girl who snapped Lumbard's own handcuffs on his big wrists.

McGee followed. He was searched just as thoroughly as Lumbard, and, satisfied at last, the girl clamped McGee's handcuffs on his wrists, then stepped back, picking up her rifle.

They were a silent, hard-faced lot a short time later as McGee and Lumbard were being marched back to the old house. Crow and another shaggy looking individual entered the house. They were gone a few minutes, and returned talking in low tones. They halted on the porch, whispering. The other men joined them while the girl stood there behind McGee and Lumbard with her rifle ready. It was like a court in session there on the porch. Three of the men kept looking at McGee and Lumbard with frowns. At last they reluctantly nodded. Crow finally came back to Lombard.

"What you say holds some water at any rate," he half growled. "We'll take what truck we can of yours with us. It's quite a piece 'cross the island where we're goin'. Walk as you're told. Do as you're told. One step outa line, an' there'll be two more dead men on the island.

"Listen to me for just a moment, Mr. Crow," began Lumbard. "There's that man you admit killing down there. He's worth a lot of money to you, my friend. Ten thousand dollars, dead and in a box. That's more money than you'll make in years moonshining—"

"Moonshinin'?" Crow's eyes narrowed, his face appearing to become leaner and more hawk-like. "So you figure that there *is* some of that goin' on on the island—"

"Of course!" Lumbard was gambling desperately again. "What of it? That's none of my business. I've told you before that we are not remotely interested in anything like that. We don't want to hear anything more about it, but I want you to take good care of that body. In our bags there in the house, you'll find the man's picture and his full description. Be sure to bring all of those bags. I'll gamble everything on what we're able to show you out of those bags. You've made yourself a nice sum of money. There's still a lot more to be made if you'll listen to what we have to tell you."

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"Lump," Crow turned to one of the men, "you an' Zeck an' Ed get them things. Let's get goin' to hell away from here. But get this, mister. Get it straight." He turned, tapping a stubby-nailed forefinger on Lumbard's chest. "We're Swamp Rabbits. Maybe that don't mean nothin' to you, but it does to some. It means we ain't the kind to ask the damned law for nothin'. To hell with the reward. All we want from you is proof you ain't lookin' for folks what might make a little corn liquor now an' then. If you can prove you ain't tryin' to do us dirt, then we'll do what we can for you. If you can't prove it, then we'll just sink your vitals full of lead an' feed you to the 'gators.

"Turn!" He caught Lumbard by the arm, half-turning him and giving him a shove. "Start walkin', an' watch yourself. My Anna's good enough with that rifle she's totin' to knock an eye out by lantern shine at forty yards."

CHAPTER IV

The Surprise

THE rocky face of the island rose right there back of the house. Atop of a small cliff stretched a short, weed-grown flat, and beyond, backed against another short cliff was the old barn. The Swamp Rabbits herded their prisoners along, following a trail seldom used by the looks of the weeds growing in the middle of it.

They were a silent lot, these men and the pretty girl. Before they had gone very far, another man, scarcely more than a youth, joined them. Like the others he was roughly dressed in overalls, a patched shirt spotlessly clean, and a battered brown hat. There were no shoes on his feet. He eyed McGee and Lumbard without a word, and dropped in behind them with a high-powered sporting rifle of the latest make in the crook of his right arm. He was Tripp Crow without a doubt, the son Jedd Crow had mentioned.

Lumbard cursed himself under his breath. He had no liking for this business of being handcuffed with his own handcuffs and herded along almost at the point of guns. But this was no place to argue. These people were not fond of it. They were of the hill-billy type, quick to anger, deadly dangerous. At the same time, they might become his friends, and once they became a friend, they would stick to a man through thick and thin, come what would or could.

But it was a ridiculous situation just the same, one where everything had to stop and give these self-styled Swamp Rabbits their own way about everything. A few words could bring on disaster. At the same time, a few words might soothe over everything.

Lumbard tried to engage Jedd Crow in conversation, but Crow was in no mood for it, and they tramped on for two miles or more before they came to the edge of a cornfield. At last a rough-boarded house showed in the distance, shaded by two giant mulberry trees.

"My house," grunted Crow, walking there at Lumbard's side. "Not much to look at, maybe, but it's home. My granddaddy come here right after the Civil War. Couldn't stand them damned Yankee carpet-baggers an' their kind what come down outa Yankeeland to take over the state. He was a colonel in the war. Marsh Brindlee who built that house you was at come 'fore Grandpappy come. Brought his slaves with 'im. Buried 'em there be-

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low the house as they died. Died there, 'imse'f thirty year' ago this past spring. Some say the house had a heap of fixin's in Marsh Brindlee's day. Anyhow, he was what I reckon you'd call the beginnin' of the Swamp Rabbits. None of 'em ever drawed a bead on a Yankee an' missed. Maybe that's all we got to be proud of; an' when Old Abe Lincoln put the tax on whiskey it was too much for any white man to stand for."

It was along speech for him, and then he was silent again, remaining that way until they reached the house. There in front of the run-down porch they halted. Rifle butts were dropped to the ground. Anna Crow moved on into the house with her rifle still in the crook of her arm. It seemed to Lumbard as he watched her that the rifle was a part of her, that she carried it with the same ease and thoughtlessness of a man carrying a cane. He heard her call somebody. It sounded like "Granny!" An instant later there was a scream, the sound of a chair turning over with a crash, a quick pound of feet, and a muffled cry.

Tripp Crow, Old Jedd, and the man who had been called Lump darted upon the porch, their guns ready. In a yelling, snarling mass, they were falling back then as the unmistakable chatter of a tommy-gun started shooting there inside the house. Then, appearing at each corner of the house, four other men leaped into being.

"Get up your hands!" barked a voice. "Right now!"

With a glance to the right and left, Lumbard saw that the little group there in the yard was covered with tommy-guns from the corners of the house. Then a slide window was thrown open there at the left of the door. With a short stump of a cigar in his mouth and a machine-gun in his hands, a burly, dark-faced man looked out.

It was Crash Finnegan.

"Nice party, eh?" Finnegan's thin, hard lips curled in a smile. "Well, you birds started it—you and your damned old rattletrap guns against my mugs and tommies!"

HE laughed suddenly. Crash Finnegan could do that when he had everything in his favor. There on the porch lay three men, ripped down in cold blood as if lightning had struck them. The three men there with Lumbard and McGee were trapped, their guns lying at their feet, their hands lifted, faces still pale from the shock of what they had just witnessed there on the porch.

"Nice party," repeated Finnegan, looking straight at Lumbard now, his black eyes twinkling. "So glad to meet you two plugs here, John and Shorty. A nice, quiet place with no harness bulls to come running to help you draw your chestnuts out of the fire. I didn't know that it was you two last night, but three of my boys happened to be down at the old house when you squirts arrived. Smart men tie themselves to me, John Lumbard. You've picked off a few stupid plugs in the past, but none of you Washington smart guys have tackled the Versatile Seven and made it stick.

"I might tell you the Versatile Seven has grown to the Versatile Twelve in the past few months, and that doesn't count our outside help. Here, you!" He glanced at two of his men at the left corner of the house. "Clean up the mess. That old dry well back of Crow's corn crib will come in handy for these squirts on the porch. Crow's distillery will take care of the

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others. Clear them out. I'll have plenty to say to Lumbard and McGee later, but right now we can expect more Swamp Rabbits to come. Making rot-gut whiskey at night and visiting by day is about all these birds have to do."

Lumbard and McGee and the three Swamp Rabbits behind them were being marched away a few moments later. Tommy-guns herded them along to an old, run-down barn a dozen rods west of the house and all but concealed behind a squat grove of pines.

Two more of Crash Finnegan's gunmen were waiting in the hallway of the barn with guns cradled in their arms. Lumbard, McGee and the three Swamp Rabbits were marched into a stable. Here an old manger had been pulled to one side, revealing a short length of shackly stairs going down into a dark hole in the ground. It was here, at the head of the stairs, that one of the Finnegan men gave Lumbard a swift push. He fell headlong down the opening, and was conscious of other men falling behind him before his head struck something and darkness swallowed him.

He came to a few minutes later with the dim light of a candle throwing its weak glow over a large underground room and an old, old woman in a ragged sun bonnet bending over him and holding a cracked cup of some ungodly smelling stuff to his lips.

"It's cawn," she cackled. "Good cawn. It'll pull you right up, mister, an' make a plum new man out of you."

Something had told him that he had already downed some of the stuff. His throat was burning as though he had swallowed a tumbler of the hottest pepper sauce. He took another drink of it, managed to get it down, and sat up coughing violently. He saw then that McGee had used the handcuff key he carried on his watch chain, for the handcuffs had been removed.

McGee was sitting on an old wooden tub. The three Swamp Rabbits were leaning against a stone wall. The place had a sweetish-sour smell. Lumbard saw that it was a large underground room with stone-walled passageways leading away from it. In the dim light, he looked through a low doorway. Beyond it a lantern was burning. He caught a glimpse of barrels and vats. It was a moonshine distillery, all right.

A SCRAPING sound came from overhead a few moments later. A noise of gruff voices followed. Anna Crow came down the stairs, her face red with weeping. For a few minutes she stood there in the arms of the old woman.

"They killed Pa, Granny," she sobbed. "They killed Tripp and Lump. Shot them down and didn't give them no show at all."

"Wash has done told me!" There was fire in Granny's harsh old voice. "What'd I say all along. Jedd had no speck of business gettin' croney with them thar ol' city folks, nohow. They come here this mornin' an' cotched me right out by the ol' wash-pot. 'Fore I knowed it one of 'em totched me in the back with a gun. They knocked me down right thar by the pot, an' fetched me out here, fastenin' me in. If I'd knowed they was sneakin' up on me an' I'd had time to get your gran'pappy's ol' hawg rifle I'd 'a' got me a durned Yankee."

"Hush, Granny!"

The secret trap-door overhead had moved again. A slick-faced youth, barefooted and wearing overalls and a patched black hat, was tumbled down the stairs. He sat up wild-eyed. In

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his hand was a half-gallon lard pail.

"Johnny Polk now, huh?" grunted Granny. "What'cha doin' out, young un, an' all them thar ol' men runnin' loose on the island to kill ever' Swamp Rabbit they can lay eye on?"

"They're a-catchin' ever'body!" The youth's voice was a shriek. "They're a-sayin' they're gonta fill this place with Swamp Rabbits an' drop some stuff in here what'll kill us all."

Gradually now, Lumbard got it all. Finnegan and his gang had been in the swamp for something in the neighborhood of a month. One of the gang had been badly wounded, and it was there that the maudlin doctor of the road house had been brought into it. One of the gang had evidently known and trusted him.

They had sent out for him, had brought him in, and had kept him for over a week in the run-down houses where they had set up their headquarters somewhere north of the old house Lumbard and McGee had found on the point of the island.

Finnegan and all his men had been exceptionally nice at the beginning. They had told their own pretty tale of having been forced to flee revenue officers. Among these old-fashioned moonshiners the gang had found sympathy readily. Each of them had heard his own tale of the harshness of the North. Crash Finnegan might have remained among them and at peace with them for any length of time as far as they were concerned. But fearing that the Swamp Rabbits' continued traffic in moonshine whiskey would bring the law to the island and the gang would be discovered hiding here, Finnegan had ordered a ban on it.

It had been Crash Finnegan's inglorious mistake. He had ordered something that the federal government had been trying to enforce since the Civil War. It had inflamed the Swamp Rabbits, and sure that his guns would accomplish anything, one of Finnegan's men had shot down a Swamp Rabbit in cold blood, trying, as Finnegan, himself, had expressed it, "to put the fear of God in the entire island and the swamp to boot." His mistake lay in the fact that he did not know these people. They were a fighting race, sons and daughters of men who had ridden through the blood, the hell and damnation of war with General Robert E. Lee.

"They bring all kinds of things in here," explained Anna Crow. "They have a very fast boat. It goes out at night now and then. We never know where it goes."

"And that reminds me of a noise we heard last night," said Lumbard. "A terrible, wailing sound—"

"The horse-fiddle, yes," nodded the girl. "It's the Swamp Rabbits' way of calling to each other—"

"Better not jist puke up all you know to these men, Anna!" cut in old Granny with a growl. "You hain't able to tell a speck about it. You mought be a-hearin' it throwed back in your face in a durned ol' co't house one of these days."

"WE'LL never see a court house again, Granny." The girl glanced at her, then turned back to Lumbard. "The thing you heard was a hollow cut out of a log with a hide stretched over one end of it like a banjo. Fastened to the middle of the hide and running down to a cross-string at the bottom is a heavy piece of twine. The man handling it scraped the twine with resin. They were trying last night to bring in all

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the swamp people. You see, there are two more islands, both much smaller than this."

"We've got to get out of here," half-whispered McGee when the girl paused. "Remember that stuff in the basement room last night, and you'll just about know what Crash has up his sleeve."

Lumbard got up. They inspected the place then. They found that it contained five rooms. The still, itself, had an outlet for the fumes of the oil it burned, but it was merely a round hole ten inches in diameter running through the earth and a sheet-iron pipe hidden somehow in the old stables.

There were two other outlets. Ditches had been dug and boxed in with rock, and the dirt returned. From the girl, Lumbard learned that they ran down the hill. The mouth of one was hidden in a clump of huckleberry bushes. The other was a spillway for slops and ran to an old sink-hole in the earth and not far away.

"Nobody knows where the slop goes," explained the girl, "when it enters that hole. The other is an air hole for ventilation."

By this time, more Swamp Rabbits were being sent down the stairs. Two women carrying babies in their arms were among the lot. Lumbard knew what Finnegan was going to do.

"How many people live here in the swamp," he asked the girl.

"Thirty-nine on this island!" spoke up Granny, readily. "That's countin' the Thrashers' latest boy."

With three men dead it would leave thirty-six. Finnegan could easily jam that many people down here. Those he shot in his general round-up could be thrown in the well he had mentioned. That would clean the island completely. Then, with about a dozen shots fired into the place from a lethal gas pistol, it would all be over.

Lumbard again studied the holes. Anna Crow remained close to him. In their conversations he learned that she had been out of the swamp long enough to attend school and, returning, had become the school teacher of the island. But these holes boxed with rock offered little, especially when the girl told him that the one that brought in the air ran for all of thirty yards and that the earth above the hole was six feet deep. His only hope, he realized now, was to tear out that vent hole above the still. But thick logs spanned the room overhead, placed close together to hold up the weight of the earth and the old stables. There was nothing in any of the rooms that a man could cut with. Crash Finnegan had probably seen to all of that.

There was one more place. That was up the stairs, and up there a man would meet two others ready to "sew" him down with a pair of tommy-guns. It was a fool's choice. Lumbard knew that, but he kept his mind centered on it.

Hours passed. Lumbard's watch told him that it was getting close to night. While they had waited, more Swamp Rabbits had been herded down the steps. Again there were women and children in the groups, showing that Finnegan was getting everybody together on the island. Two of the women were crying. Between their sobs, Lumbard learned that Finnegan's men had added a couple more murders to the long list of crimes behind the gang.

LUMBARD moved on to the stairway. The entire place had been there since the girl could remember anything. The steps were hand-

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hewn oak, thick, deeply worn by the passing up and down of countless feet. By a tiny, blade-like ray from a small flashlight Lumbard always carried in an upper vest pocket, he inspected them. While he was in the process of it the old manger overhead was again moved. A voice cursed. Two more Swamp Rabbits came plunging down the stairs with their hands bound behind them with lengths of cotton plow lines.

Surely this was Crash Finnegan's day, but Lumbard had caught a glimpse of lights overhead. That told him that it had grown dark, and his spirits quickened. He stole up the steps, crouched, and squatted there listening. A mumble of the voices of two men, without a doubt the guards, came to him. Lumbard caught snatches of the low conversation.

"Like shooting fish in a bath tub with a typewriter, eh, Pinky? . . . Nobody ever visits in here . . . Crash knows . . . Nobody comes. Only the Rabbits sneak out now and then. Sometimes they're not seen at a place for a year . . . It's all in the bag."

"Yes, if it wasn't for these damned G-Men. Somebody sent 'em."

"Crash'll find out all about it before he's done. Mark my word. Crash never forgets any little detail."

"Too bad Hook killed the Negro; he would have talked easy . . . I'm scared of that guy, Race. He's too handy with that claw he carries on his right nub instead of a hand. Now and then I catch 'im sitting and staring at a man's throat. The hook on the nub seems to itch . . . "

The voices trailed away, dying to a low buzzing. Lumbard dared to use his light again. He tried to move the secret trapdoor, but something was holding it from the outside. Then he heard the men coming back with others with them. Somebody was protesting. The voice of a woman was crying weakly. Before Lumbard could get out of the way, the trap-door started to open.

It was then that something happened. There was a sudden snarl of oaths, the quick race of feet of two men making a desperate dash to get away, and then the vicious, ten-round burst of a tommy-gun punctuated by a woman's scream. Lumbard gave the trapdoor a push. It swung further to one side. He darted up, plunged into a dark stable, and crowded down beyond a pile of straw. Something as quick as light had followed him, flinging down beside him.

It was Anna Crow. And then, just as they thought they were safe, a rasp-voice came to them: "Somebody came out of that hole, Pinky!"

CHAPTER V

Hemmed In

IT was the girl without a doubt that saved him for the moment. She rolled over on Lumbard, caught him by the coat sleeve, and in the darkness they slid under a hand-hewn beam. They were outside now with a few pale stars showing in the sky. But it was none too soon. Somebody had seen a flicker of movement beyond the pile of straw. A gun started blazing. A voice snarled and cursed somebody, the bullet thudding into the beam and the thick puncheon planks of the wall.

Lumbard and the girl lost no time getting away from there. It was no place for people without something to fight with. In a stumbling run they headed for a brush and weed-grown gully. They reached it just as the dark form of a man darted out of the hall-

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way of the barn and started cursing his companions.

"I told you to watch it, damn you!"

"There they go!" bawled another voice. "Get 'em!"

Shots followed, but the bullets did not come toward Lumbard and the girl. They passed on over the gully below them. A calf out there in the tall weeds and sassafras bushes bawled miserably, floundering about as it went down from the jarring impact of bullets. Again one of the gangsters cursed.

But Lumbard and Anna Crow were hurrying on, heading in the general direction of the house. They heard somebody pass them, rushing along in the darkness. Coming out of the gully behind low cedars, Lumbard and the girl followed along close to the thick split-pine palings of a vegetable garden's fence. They gained the corner of a little log smoke house, halting to listen.

All the noise was concentrated back there behind them at the barn. Not a sound came from the house. Lumbard's first thought was to rush on into it with the hopes of finding a gun of some kind, but better sense warned him to wait. It was well that he did.

A figure emerged from the house, walking cautiously. It was so dark here that Lumbard could barely see the figure of the man. Whoever he was, he was a cautious fellow. He kept close to the wall of the house, moving along a few steps at a time. Something told Lumbard that he was carrying a pistol in either hand.

Lumbard tricked him. When the man was barely ten feet away Lumbard eased his handcuffs from his pocket. He tossed them so that they would strike the ground five feet beyond the creeping man. Instantly the man whirled, an oath forming on his lips. Lumbard was upon him from behind in two quick, furious leaps.

But the man was quick. He whirled, almost facing Lumbard. An automatic pistol in his right hand exploded, ripping out a gash of fire. By the light of the gun, Lumbard struck. He felt his fist crash home on the man's jaw. Something dropped. With the fury of a charging wild bull, Lumbard struck again. Again something dropped. This time a bouncing automatic pistol exploded, and then Lumbard and the man were down, fighting like two giant cats in the darkness there under the very edge of the house.

Both men were fighting for their lives. Both knew it. The gangster knew how to fight, how to cover himself even on the ground. He knew how to punch. A short right hook caught Lumbard just below the ear. For a second things turned hazy. He felt himself shot through the air, and then the other man was on top.

Without ceasing his swift, downward rain of blows he started yelling to the men at the barn.

"Help, boys, *help!* It's Dutch! I've got a guy down!"

Somebody answered him. Racing footsteps followed. The sharp, far-reaching crash of a repeating rifle from a rear window of the house turned the footsteps and sent the owners of them racing off in another direction with some man cursing in a way that told Lumbard that he had been struck by the repeating rifle's bullet.

The rest was lost there in the fight. Lumbard could hardly believe that the girl had darted on into the house the moment he had leaped for his man. But in the house she was, blazing away with deadly accuracy, using her own rifle that had been scorned by Finnegan's gang as "an old-fashioned pea-

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shooter" and not worthy of a first-class fighting man's attention.

LUMBARD came up from there. He came up struggling and clawing. Just in time he caught the wrist of the man he was fighting. Something stung him along the forearm. Lumbard knew it for a knife of some sort. He held on to the wrist and managed to drive in a blow to the man's jaw. It staggered the man to one side. Before he could recover himself Lumbard had struck again.

The man went down this time, breaking loose from Lumbard. Then Lumbard's right knee struck something. It was one of the automatic pistols. He snatched it up, struck with all his weight behind the blow, and the man in front of him went down, caught just behind the ear with the blow that would have crushed a thinner skull.

Now the other automatic and his handcuffs! Lumbard found them, snatching them up. He whipped the now unconscious man's hands behind his back. The handcuffs chattered. Lumbard stood up. The girl's voice came to him then, crying out its vengeance and hate inside the house as she again fired at somebody near the barn.

"Come on, you black dogs, and see how you like it! It's not a one-sided thing any more! Come on with your fine guns and try it out with this old gun of mine!"

Lumbard hastily dragged his man around the corner of the house. He spoke a low word of warning to the girl. A moment later, still dragging his prisoner, he was entering the house. He sprawled the man on the floor of the lean-to kitchen and found a piece of wire hanging on a nail in the wall. A few minutes later he was through with his prisoner, having wired him hard and fast by the handcuffs to an old blacksmith's anvil sitting against the wall.

Looking for his own bags and guns, he hurried into the main room of the house then. In the center of the floor he stumbled over the body of a man, and fell. Sitting up, he felt over the body. It was long dead and cold, and he could not resist flashing his light for just an instant. To his sudden delight, he saw that it was the body of Phil Bailey—a ragged red scar on his forehead.

"Nice of the gang to bring you up from the swamp rim!" hissed Lumbard. "The party's complete—and couldn't have been without your pretty mug, Phil."

He moved on then. His bags were there, tossed on the bed, all of them ripped open. But Finnegan had evidently had enough guns of his own. He had left everything intact. In a minute Lumbard was hurrying back to the kitchen. He fired a burst from his own machine-gun at the barn, holding his shots high in fear of the bullets striking some of the innocent Swamp Rabbits.

"They're gone," whispered Anna Crow. "There must have been only five or six of them here at the house. The others are either at their boat or they're out after the rest of the Swamp Rabbits."

"Look out for tricks," warned Lumbard. "Finnegan's no slouch when it comes to pulling them. Of course, all our play was the unexpected. Men like him get bolder when everything's going in their favor. He had us right where he wanted us."

They waited a few minutes longer, watching. Lumbard saw people coming then. A dark mass of moving shapes

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started out the hallway of the barn. A little more light coming from the sky told Lumbard that they were Swamp Rabbits. McGee was there among them somewhere. Lumbard yelled to him:

"'Watch yourself, Shorty! Don't be a fool! I—"

A sudden burst of firing cut him off. There was a yell from the Swamp Rabbits. A woman screamed. A child set up a screeching wail of terror.

Guns had ripped the night with their gashes of flame. They came from a gully east of the barn, throwing the Swamp Rabbits back into the protection of the barn. And now, as if by prearranged agreement, a tommy-gun in front of the house sent a hail of bullets splintering in through the thin walls.

Anna Crow sobbed out something. Her rifle dropped from her hands. She swayed, staggering. Lumbard caught her in his arms as she was falling.

CHAPTER VI

Fire Points the Way

OUT there in the darkness, having come back to Crow's farm just in time, Crash Finnegan had taken the situation in hand. He was not worried in the least about it; he knew what to do, how to handle this thing. In addition, he knew who it was that had escaped with the girl. It was that damned John Lumbard, not his stupid stooge. McGee could not track an elephant in ten feet of snow—unless John Lumbard was right there behind him to tell him what to do.

The whole island was in Finnegan's hands now. The Swamp Rabbits were right where he wanted them. Some had been damned fools enough to try to fight with their old weapons. Old Man Sam Lord, over there on his farm two miles away, had even tried to put up a fight with an old-fashioned, muzzle-loader shotgun.

An old buck of somewhere past ninety hobbling out to his gate with a crooked cane in one hand and his gun in the other! It had been just too bad. Just like another old fool on the north end of the island with his ancient musket that had seen service in Chickamauga Creek back in that bloody Confederate victory in 1863. Two pops in the belly from a Colt's .38 automatic had finished them both.

For this was no child's game. This was a game of life or death where the strongest survived and the weak jumped headlong and straight for hell! Lumbard and McGee were still alive. It was the exact way Crash Finnegan wanted them—at least for a little while longer. They would talk, those guys. There were means and ways of making any man who ever lived sing his little song, providing the right man had charge of the situation.

He had heard of a way he wanted to try. These stupid Swamp Rabbits had told him how one of Sherman's hard-riding cavalry officers had prevailed upon a stubborn Southern soldier of Yancey's Sharpshooters to loosen his tongue. It was a burning knot of rich pine held six inches above a man's naked belly. Old Gran'pap Brooks, the owner of the musket, had told the tale of how the man's cries could be heard a mile away every time one of the boiling and burning drops of pitch landed on his belly. No Washington pussy-foot would stand that long. He would tell just what brought him to this place, how many knew of his coming, and all about it.

This hide-out was too good for a man to give up without a struggle. In the old house where he had set up his headquarters there was money, nearly

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three hundred thousand dollars in the stuff that made the wheel go 'round and 'round. Among it were jewels and jewelry taken in a dozen hold-ups. Jewels and jewelry enough to make a sultan leave his throne! The speed boat so artfully hidden in the swamp was ready, always conditioned. A step aboard if the worst came to the worst —and good-by Alabama, hello, South America, or some of the other safe places for a man when the birds in Washington got too nosey.

But just yet everything was still in hand. That house and the old barn, with its big moonshine distillery underneath, were surrounded. A cat could not leave either place. Already the moon was rising, the yellow-gold light beginning to break over the gloomy jungle of the swamp. In a few minutes now the upper rim of the great, golden disk would be showing. Finnegan settled back to wait. Everything was so quiet now a man could hear his wrist watch ticking.

The moon came up, big, bold and clear, spreading its growing light across the island. Somewhere down in the swamp an owl boomed his half-sad, half-mocking cry to the night. A mocking bird flew into the tall old mulberry tree there above Finnegan's head at the end of the gully. The bird trilled a soft song to the night. In the distance a whippoorwill sang out. Finnegan heard somebody cursing in the house. He lifted his head cautiously.

"Hello, Lumbard!" he called. "Do you want to still play the fool or do you want to come up with your dukes in the air?"

A minute passed before one of Finnegan's own men answered him from the safety of a gully south of the house.

"It's Lumbard in there, all right, Crash! Him and the Crow dame! I think we got her with that blast we poured in the house!"

"You did get her, you fools!" That was Dutch Slitz's voice rising now from inside the house. "You fools, you almost got me with it! I'm here in the house, handcuffed and wired down to something behind—"

SOMETHING cut him off. Finnegan could guess that it was John Lumbard's hand suddenly clamped over Dutch's big mouth. No matter, anyway. If Dutch was fool enough to let that Washington pussyfoot take him, that was Dutch's fault. Only a fool would have let such a thing happen. He had been left there in the house with Frank Glocke to look after things. A soft job for two of the softest men in the entire outfit.

"I'll give you ten minutes to make up your mind, Lumbard!" Again Finnegan was calling. "You haven't the chance of a wax doll dropped in the middle of hell, and you know it, big boy. Be man enough to come out instead of hiding behind a pretty dame's skirt. I've always heard that you had a pinch of nerve. That's saying a lot for you Washington squirts, considering the way you had to take John Dillinger and rub him out."

But taunts brought no answer from the house. Once Finnegan heard a chair turn over. The continued silence told him that Dutch Slitz had either been slammed down over the head with the barrel of a gun or a gag had been placed in his mouth.

The silence wore on. An hour passed. A short, bullet-headed Italian came up the gully, joining Finnegan. Finnegan kept taunting Lumbard, but nothing he could think of to say would bring a reply from the big detective. It

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grew as monotonous as hell, sitting here like this!

Crash Finnegan was a man of action once he started a thing, and things had been going so well until a slip had been made down there at the old barn. Sitting, waiting, watching and listening did not appeal to him. He cursed the Italian for something, made him sit there and watch, and turned back down the gully to smoke cigarette after cigarette. He was perfectly safe. He *knew* that.

Rising higher and higher, the round-faced Southern moon had become a great lantern in the sky. Many stars were out and shining brightly now. The island lay bathed in the soft, golden light. The house and barn were so well-lighted Finnegan could see every line and crack there in the old walls; and so far, McGee and those Swamp Rabbits down there in the barn were keeping as quiet as mice with a hungry cat watching them. They had, as Finnegan knew full well, gone back down in the old distillery. McGee and possibly one or two of the bolder ones would be on guard there in the barn, ready to knock the brains out of any of the gang who dared to venture back into the building, but the distillery was the only safe place for the others, especially if the boys happened to take the notion to fire a few more shots at the place.

MIDNIGHT finally came. There were yet no results. Finnegan had sent the Italian away, and the man had returned, slipping up the gully. Finnegan turned to him eagerly.

"Got it all fixed, Tony?"

The man nodded there in the moonlight. The smell of oil now filled the air around Finnegan. The man had returned with a can of mixed gasoline and kerosene, a half-dozen balls of cotton wound with twine, and a heavy pair of gloves.

It was exactly what Finnegan wanted. He yelled to Lumbard once more. No answer came back to him. He turned then to the can and the balls of cotton. He saturated the balls with the kerosene and gasoline, making them sopping wet with the stuff, and then drew on the heavy gloves.

"All right, Tony, light 'em," he ordered, huskily.

A few moments later blazing balls of fire were flying out of the head of the gully. With the trueness of bullets, they sped straight to the roof of the old house. They struck, the twine breaking, the blazing cotton spreading out on the split boards.

Three were enough. Finnegan gave the order for Tony Sevetti not to light the others.

"We might want to use them on the barn," he explained.

Old wood burns rapidly. Every Finnegan man around the old house was tense now. The flames along the roof were shooting up. The house, after all, was but a shell, unceiled, and had never known a coat of paint.

"Take him alive if he comes out with his hands up!" roared Finnegan a few minutes later. "He can't stand it much longer!"

It was almost like fire flung over a pile of dry hay. It seemed less than ten minutes before the old roof was caving in. Through one of the windows Finnegan could see that the main room was a blazing inferno. He heard the old windows start breaking. Through the raging flames he saw something moving. It was John Lumbard rushing about like a man trapped in hell. He disappeared. Suddenly he reappeared. Falling splinters of burning loft planks came down on him. Finnegan saw him

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plunge downward in the flames. He never came up again.

CHAPTER VII

Granny

FALLING planks, raining fire, and sizzling heat—and Dutch Slitz mumbling and smacking like a pig behind his gag, his eyes two glaring balls of terror. They were down in the old cellar beneath the house. John Lumbard was working like a madman, tearing away the thick stones in the wall. Anna Crow, her shoulder in a rough bandage where a bullet had ripped through her tender skin, was sitting there. The dead body of Phil Bailey lay beside her. In the furnace-like blaze of sobbing and roaring light Phil Bailey seemed to be enjoying the scene immensely.

Prowling about down there in the ancient cellar with his little flashlight, Lumbard had found the old crack in the stones. A blade of his light had shown him a passageway beyond the wall. It was one that had undoubtedly been dug by Jedd Crow's father right after the Civil War. The light told Lumbard that it headed straight toward the barn, toward that ancient distillery. For some reason, perhaps the fear that if his distillery was discovered by officers of the government his family would suffer along with him, Jedd Crow's father had sealed the place. In the years that had passed it had been completely forgotten. Not even the girl knew that it was there or once suspected it.

Lumbard had found an old dirt pick. About the first thing that had happened was that the handle of the pick had broken. Short gouging had followed, rapid, man-killing work. Lumbard had brought the girl down, then the body of Phil Bailey, then the gagged Dutch. His bags and guns had followed. But the wall had been so well sealed it was almost impossible to tear it out. Jedd Crow's old father had known what he was about. Only time, something no man could foresee, had given his secret away.

The girl tried to help, and never had Lumbard seen a gamer girl. She still had her rifle. She knew nothing of those machine-guns, nothing of the art of handling them, but she dug away at the stones, hurling them back and out of the way as fast as Lumbard loosened one. The hole into the hidden passageway widened with alarming slowness.

And the heat! It was a living hell down here now. Dutch Slitz's face looked like a round, thick-lipped lump of meat ready to start sweating blood. His grunts behind his gag had become more pig-like than ever. The fear of death was visibly upon him. It looked like his eyes would jump from their sockets when another thundering and booming of falling timbers roared above them, sending down their rain of burning bits of wood through the wide cracks in the heavy floor.

"Now!" Lumbard's voice was breathless. "Go, Anna! You're the gamest little thing I ever met!"

He caught her almost roughly, thrusting her head first into the hole. She was soon gone, dragging her rifle, but she came back. He handed her his heavy bags and guns. She hurried them away. He shoveled the bulky figure of Dutch Slitz through the hole then. The girl was there to help, and Dutch helped himself, kicking his way along, glad to get anywhere now.

The body of Phil Bailey was almost Lumbard's undoing. It was as stiff as a plank; it stuck there in the hole. For a minute it looked liked the end. Lum-

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bard was about to haul the body back and let the flames and falling timbers have it while he saved himself, but there was a fighting girl there on the other side of the hole. She came back, caught the body by the shoulders, and with all her strength and all of Lumbard's, an unruly devil even in death was shot on through the hole.

Now, at last, it was Lumbard's turn. He went through the hole with falling sparks raining on his ankles and the back of his neck blistered from the heat. Once through the hole it was cool, so cool it was like a man slipping into refreshing water. But there was no time to think about that. He had seen that the old passageway reached far out beyond the house. The thing now was to keep on going and get away from this place.

WORKING with the same fury with the bags, the prisoner and the body of Phil Baker, they pushed on for thirty or forty yards, and came into a deep underground room. Now Lumbard could understand it all. Jedd Crow's father had first had his distillery out here under some cabin or building long ago rotted and fallen down. For a moment it looked as if they had literally jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

They would not live long here. The air would soon be gone. The fire was sucking the cool air out of the place now, and then Lumbard discovered that he was standing in a draft. He followed it to a stack of rotted barrels against the wall.

The barrels fell apart as he took hold of them; and then he saw another low passageway.

His respect immediately arose for these Southern moonshiners. Here was the way the older Crow had obtained the water for his illegal whisky-making. At the end of a dozen yards, stumbling along over rotted wooden troughs, Lumbard came to a wall of loose stones. The air was rushing in through the stones, drawn by the heat, and soon the old pick with the broken handle was at work again, carefully pulling away the stones. In a minute Lumbard was looking through the hole and down into a deep well. It was then that Anna Crow came up behind him, touching him on the arm.

"Come back, quick," she ordered. "Somebody's digging through the wall of the room."

Lumbard whirled and followed her. There in the room beyond rotted vats the scraping noise of something was making itself known. Lumbard tore away the vats while the girl held the light. As they fell away he saw something shiny gouge its way through the old mortar between two stones. It was the locking bar of a pair of handcuffs.

Shorty McGee was coming!

Lumbard set to work with the old pick again. He tore into the old stones furiously and without regard for the fat blisters, many of them broken, in the palms of his hands. Soon the stones were falling to the right and left. The girl lowered the flashlight. Like a trapped possum, Shorty McGee's face showed, grimy, covered with perspiration. Behind him, holding a lantern, was a Swamp Rabbit. When Lumbard spoke, Shorty McGee almost shouted.

"One of the last batch of Swamp Rabbits they brought in happened to remember that there was a passage," McGee was explaining in a drawl that had become decidedly Swamp Rabbitish. "We had a hell of a time finding it. One of the fellows had a big knife. We broke it soon after we

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started. It's been a hell of a job, John."

"It's not over yet, Shorty," Lumbard reminded him.

"You're durned a-tootin' hit aint," added the Swamp Rabbit with the lantern. "That thar barn, hit's plum surrounded. Thar hain't yit a speck of chanct fer a man to show his haid above the ground 'thout gittin' 'im a bullet betwixt the eyeballs. We're still like mud-turtles trapped in a den."

"You can use a gun, can't you, old-timer?" demanded Lumbard.

"Shore kin!" The Swamp Rabbit chuckled. "I had me one of them thar fast-shooters, but it was a-lyin' on my fireboard at home an' I didn't have no chanct to fetch it along. I mought 'a' got me one of them thar black Yankees if I had. Kin you gimme somethin' what'll shoot damned fast an' straight I'm Gabriel Brindlee. I'd shore be a-bliged to you."

"Take these, if you can use them and you're sure about it." Lumbard handed him the two automatics and two extra clips of cartridges he had taken from Dutch Slitz. "I'll give you something else if you'd rather have it."

"Mister," there was a gleam in the washed-out gray eyes of the man in front of Lumbard now, "us Swamp Rabbits air a Gawd-a-fearin' folks, holdin' faith in Heaven an' in Hell, but we l'arn to cut our jaw teeth on guns. These is jist like the one I got lyin' at home on the fireboard. Let's be a-goin'. Thar's grit in my belly an' muscles in my beard."

"You ain't a-goin' nowhar yit, Gabe Brindlee!" That was a new voice. It was old Granny crawling through the hole.

"Then thar mean devils have done a-set fire to that thar barn. Hit's right now a heap sight hotter back thar than Lawyer Row in Hell!"

CHAPTER VIII

The Justice of G-Men

A PUZZLED frown crossed Crash Finnegan's dark face. He stood up in plain sight, his eyes bitter and narrow as he watched the sides of the old house cave-in. The flames crackled up. The wind caught the sparks, roaring them away overhead. High in the sky the dark, lolling clouds of black smoke rolled away, some like the smoke from oil, some as white as an old man's beard.

The wind changed then. Bannering flames licked toward the low trees between the burning house and the old barn. A cock crowed. Hens set up a nervous cackling in the run-down little chicken house back of the old vegetable garden. Finnegan was still puzzled.

He had not expected this of Big John Lumbard, had never once dreamed that the detective would go down there in the fire rather than come blundering from the house with Dutch, the body of Phil, and the girl. He was a coward after all. Like all the rest of those Washington hot-shots! Newspapers blew them and their work to the skies. Anything to kid the public along and sell copies of their papers! That was a newspaperman from socks to crown.

Now the old barn was beginning to burn. Finnegan saw the dry, split-pine boards of the old roof start to smoke. He could see everything. Why a man could read a newspaper in this glare. And there were the palings of the old garden. Fire licked along them. They were like so many thin, rich-pine uprights. The fire trotted or leaped

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along them. A dry patch of weeds in the corner started burning. The smell of burning flesh came to Finnegan now.

Burning flesh! It was damned sickening. Made a man's stomach want to turn upside down. Finnegan turned back in the gully. Tony was still squatting there, sucking on a cigarette now, his little dark eyes alight. A hard bird, that Italian.

Finnegan moved on down the gully. The stench seemed to follow him. He turned, keeping behind sassafras bushes, and semi-circled toward the barn. He passed out of the ungodly scent, and halted beside a little pine tree. Then he understood. Crow's smoke-house was burning. That stench came from smoked hams and sides of bacon. He saw the smoke-house roof fall in. Beyond it two of his men had stood up watching, their guns ready.

They circled the barn now. Fire was running all along the roof. Soon those Swamp Rabbits would want to make a break for it, especially those damned women down in the distillery with their brats. It came to Finnegan that he should order the women to be allowed to escape, but common sense changed his mind.

This was no small thing. This was a war like all other wars. One of those women escaping could put a man in the hot-seat down here in this country. A man had a fight on his hands when he went to court here. Better let 'em all go to hell and have no future regrets. Only a fool weakened when it was his life or the life of another at stake. A strong man stood by his guns.

He cursed when that rooster started crowing again. It gave him the creeps. The fire along the fence had almost reached the chicken house. Pretty soon he saw the fowls coming out of the little hut. They thought it daylight! Well, he would not have to smell their burning meat.

Something roared. It was the old barn. Flames stood straight up on its roof now. It would not be long. It seemed less than a minute. There, one corner of the roof was sagging in, the burning timbers groaning, that corner of the roof looking now like a flaming black wing wrapped in a lot of red tongues! Sparks shot up. Again old timbers groaned. It was as though long-buried souls there in the hard-seasoned wood were coming back to life, at first to life wee, whining voices, now growing into a shrieking lament. Something about it made Crash Finnegan shiver.

HOOK LASHLEY came up beside him a minute later. He was a massive brute of a man, once a prize-fighter, once a lumberjack up in those great forests along Puget Sound. Hook's hat sat on the back of his head. His undershot jaw seemed longer. Down his forehead black hair hung like a mane. Something glistened there on the stump of his right arm, the reflected firelight playing on it.

That thing always gave Crash Finnegan the creeps.

In place of a hand that had been shot off in a gun-fight out in Washington during a bank hold-up, Lashley wore a pair of steel hooks. Muscles of his arm manipulated them. The damned things were as sharp as fangs. Good things for a buck Negro's throat and a pair of damned bloodhounds—and Hook had bragged about the work after the old basement room had been gassed. Now Finnegan stepped away from him.

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It was a good thing that he did. The whole roof of the barn had just gone in when one of the gang out there beyond the burning garden fence let out a wail of warning that was like a scream of terror to every man around the blazing buildings.

"Look out, everybody! Look! In the old well, boys!"

The sharp, ten-round burst of a machine-gun answered the man. Finnegan took one look at the jerking ribbons of fire coming from a crouched figure there in the well. He heard Hook Lashley cry out then. He whirled, pawing at the air. Sheer devil in him must have held the man on his feet.

He whipped out an automatic pistol with his left hand, fired one shot at the crouching shadow there in the well behind the machine-gun, and then spun on his heel, crashing down, ripped through and through with five slugs of lead.

Finnegan turned to run for shelter. Again that machine-gun sent out its furious, typewriter beat. Something stung Finnegan in the side, raking hard along his ribs. He fell into a little gully. His old luck was with him. He was only scratched. He cursed in a hoarse whisper, then his shouting commands rose with the bellow of a bull: "It's Lumbard, boys! Don't let him get away! Give 'im hell! If he gets out of there and away from us it means the hot-seat for the whole works!"

BLAZING guns answered him. The sounds arose in a circle, the bullets all crying toward the old well. Big John Lumbard would be wishing about now that he had never been born! Finnegan cursed him with a laugh. In the next instant terror struck him.

How in the hell had John Lumbard been burned up in that house and then managed to come back to life?

Having come through the old tunnel, Shorty McGee and Gabriel Brindlee had found all the Swamp Rabbits were safe enough from the fire now. The women and children had squatted down against the walls of the underground room there near the well. The heat of both fires drawing through the tunnels placed them in a roaring draft coming down the old well.

Crouched there in the well, ducking down now and then while Shorty McGee and Gabriel Brindlee waited below, Lumbard listened to the steady thudding of the bullets. Earth flew up from the rim of the well. He thrust up his gun, fired another burst in a circle, bringing a few moments' silence from the surrounding guns.

"Watch yourself now!" he called down to McGee. "I've got to make a run for it. We're trapped here unless some of us can get out and hammer them back."

In desperation, he started. Shots tore at him. He ducked to the right and left. Ten feet away from the well he struck another one of those gullies, plunging into it.

Shots dug the loose earth and gravel off the rim of the gully. He kept going, drawing the firing away from the well. A yell a minute later told him that Shorty McGee was following him. He heard Shorty go down with a grunt, and realized that the detective had been caught by one of the bullets and bowled over there in the gully behind him.

It was hell while it lasted. Faced with a little of their own medicine, Finnegan's band suddenly tried to draw back from the scene. Lumbard caught two running figures over the sights of his gun. The gun ripped out

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a quick, furious burst. The running men stumbled, staggered, and cried out something as they plunged to the ground. One rolled over in a little gully. The other lay there without moving in the outer edge of the light from the blazing barn.

"They'll head for their hang-out and their boat!" The voice, rising behind Lumbard suddenly, startled him. He whirled. He all but brought the muzzle of his gun around to cover the crouching figure there in the gully with him. "Pa said from the start they were a cowardly pack."

It was Anna Crow.

"You!" Lumbard blurted out the word and the words that followed. "Girl, what in the hell and damnation are you doing out here? I told you to stay back there, damn it. This is not the place for you!"

"My rifle will shoot as good as yours," she answered. "Besides, this is not all your fight. We Swamp Rabbits have something to say about it. Do what you're going to do. I'll follow."

Lumbard saw her shoot a man five minutes later. He saw her rifle jerk to her shoulder—the wounded shoulder at that! He saw the blaze of fire jerk from the old muzzle. One of Finnegan's men whirled out from behind a tree almost fifty yards away. The man rocked to one side. Before Lumbard could blink his eyes, Anna Crow had fired again. The man went down, rolled over, and one leg drew up, his arms flinging out on either side of him. Lumbard caught the girl's arm as she was about to fire again.

"You got him!" he whispered. "He's down and out of the fight."

"I know," nodded the girl, sternly.

A burst of firing behind them cut her off. It told Lumbard that Shorty McGee was in action again. Then he heard the harsh, loudly bantering voice of Gabriel Brindlee rise in a taunting wail.

"Come an' git your fat meat an' sop, you hawg-eyed varmints!" he was saying. "Come outa thar with your fine guns an' let me see the color of yore eyeballs like my daddy saw 'em that time at ol' Chickamauga an' the battle of Manassas! Cuss us some more 'bout our hoe-cakes an' taters, tell us how we talk like somebody a-gettin' ready to sing a hymn! Thar hain't nothin' but rotten aigs in your bellies and muddy water in your haids for brains!"

And then there was further firing.

IT was getting nothing short of ridiculous now. Brindlee had come out of the well. A wild, ape-howling old devil, he stood there on the rim of the well in plain sight, the burning barn making him a target for anybody who wanted to shoot at him. Somebody did fire at him from the distance, the bullet screaming overhead, a miss by yards to only enrage the old man all the more.

Bang! Bang! His guns roared their defiance. He started to dance a little jig there on the rim of the well. Again his old, harshly nagging voice was going.

"What're you runnin' frum? We've done kilt half your gang. The rest'll be kilt 'fore we're done!"

"They're leaving," half-whispered the girl there beside Lumbard. "All the fight has gone out of them once they didn't have everything in their hands. Look!"

She pointed in the general direction of the old house where the Negro convict and the two dogs had been killed. Lumbard saw three men running. In a moment another man was joining them. Now wailing voices of wounded mem-

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bers of the gang started calling out that they were ready to surrender.

Lumbard left it all to McGee now. McGee could give orders. Keeping out of the firelight as much as possible, Lumbard started in hot pursuit of the four men who were getting away. He had not gone far until he discovered that Anna Crow was right at his heels.

"'Go back!" he barked at her. "You must go back!"

"You need somebody to show you the way," she answered, darting past him. "I'll be as good as any man. Do I have to write you a letter to prove it?"

She was as fleet-footed as a deer, spading along there in front of him. Twice he caught her, forcing her behind him. The last time he was just in time, catching her by the arm and jerking her behind an old pine tree.

Crash Finnegan had turned. He had turned with all the savage fury of a man mad and slobbering at the mouth. A tommy-gun in his hands roared back its defiance. He weaved, bobbing from side to side. He came charging back then, his rage robbing him of every smattering of reason. It was deliberate suicide. Hurt by Lumbard's first bullet more than he had thought, realizing that he would never reach his hide-out and the boat in the swamp, he had chosen this as the befitting end of a long career of blood and damnation. In blood he had lived, in blood he would die.

Like a fool, hating this man more than he hated anything, looking upon him as a human snake, John Lumbard raced to meet him, holding his fire, going to write this final chapter in a bad-man's history with a close-up burst of lead. He zig-zagged, ducked, weaved. Finnegan never faltered. He was like a blind man rushing straight into hell. Lumbard had never seen a man shooting so poorly. When they were ten yards apart, Lumbard blew his belly wide-open with a fifteen-round burst.

Something came over the remaining three. They were suddenly turning back, their hands in the air. Wails lifted from them. Human rats staring doom in the face, they were ready for anything now except death. They threw down their guns. They came toward Lumbard on the run; and then John Lumbard had to catch Anna Crow and hold her to keep her from wiping them out with her rifle on the spot.

MORNING broke fair over the island. It had been one night of hell. Returning to the house with his prisoners, carrying the bullet-riddled figure of Crash Finnegan, Lumbard had found Shorty McGee with his hands full trying to keep the Swamp Rabbits off the throats of the gangsters who had been left alive.

Neither Lumbard nor McGee could have prevented a lynching. There were six of the gangsters dead, three sorely wounded, and three alive. It took Anna Crow finally to talk some sense into the heads of these people.

"Give these who are living time enough to think about dying!" she had cried. "Let them think of the poor, half-helpless people they have killed here on the island. I have as much right to want to see them die as you have. They killed Tripp and Pa."

It was noon before all the dead, the wounded, and the prisoners were aboard Crash Finnegan's forty-foot, powerful cruiser. The house the men had occupied had given up two full barrels of loot. The Swamp Rabbits were reconciled at last. They had faith in John Lumbard and Shorty

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McGee, that little pudgy fellow who limped about with a bullet in his thigh. In a mob they stood gathered there on the rim of the swamp. Lumbard had talked to them.

"Never fear anything from us," he had told them. "We came for big game, we've got it through your help."

He had kept looking over the crowd anxiously. Now he saw her, a pathetically lone little figure up there on the hill leaning on her old rifle. He forgot all this talk, forgot that he had wiped out Crash Finnegan's gang. He jumped from the boat to the bank, and ran up the hill.

"Anna!" he caught the clasped hands there on the rifle. "Anna, why didn't you come down to the boat?"

"I reckon I warn't needed no more." She seemed to have forgotten that she was the school teacher of the island. She spoke to him in the slow-dragging, word-wrangling voice of her people. "It ain't often that men like you come to the swamp, Mr. Lumbard."

"Anna!" He looked down at the pale face, at the trembling lips. The girl was smiling, but there was moisture in her eyes. "Anna, will you let me go turn in this gang of human rats and come back here?"

"I reckon I'm not your kind," she answered softly. "You see, I've never been about much, but I'm thanking you for coming. You have done us a good turn. The Swamp Rabbits never forget. But—but if you really do feel like coming back, I—I reckon I'll be here sorter just a-waitin'."

The Eyes Have It

THE fear of blindness is the weapon which is used to extort money in a swindle which has been operated in the Middle West. The swindlers frequently call upon farmers and represent themselves as being eye specialists from the Rockefeller Foundation and state that they are making a survey of eye conditions and that an examination is given without charge. After the so-called examination, they instill fear into the victim by telling him, or her, that blindness will be their fate unless they secure a certain very rare drug which will effect a cure. The swindlers make it clear that they have a small quantity of this preparation in liquid form, but that the organization employing them does not permit them to sell it. With what appears to be a great deal of apprehension over losing their jobs, the swindlers finally permit the victim to buy it, at a fancy price. This great relief to suffering humanity turns out to be water, or something about as cheap.

—John Berry

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Katie Blayne's Bluff Forces a Mysterious Insurance Murderer into the Open

Bergstrom directed them toward the closet

The Duchess Pulls a Fast One

By Whitman Chambers

THE three of us, Spike and Katie Blayne and I, were alone in the City Hall press room. It was six thirty of a dark and rainy evening. I'd just taken over the beat from Spike, for the *Telegram*, and Katie was waiting for the *Sun's* night police reporter to come on the job.

"Duchess," Spike Kaylor beefed, "why don't you scram out of here and go home?"

"Spike, why don't you give yourself up?" the Duchess retorted, smiling.

"Pinky, doesn't she get in your hair the way she hangs around and hangs around, all the time?" Spike persisted.

I didn't say anything. I didn't want to be drawn into their quarrel which, for seven months, had kept the press room on pins and needles. In the first place, Spike Kaylor is my best friend. And in the second place, Katie Blayne—well, never mind about Katie Blayne.

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The fire alarm gong tapped out 236. Spike strode over to the card tacked on the bulletin board. "Fifth and Chesnut." He looked more cheerful. "Our City Hall apparatus will roll on the deuce."

"And you, dear little boys, I suppose, will take a ride on the big old fire engine," Katie jeered. "Won't that be just ducky!"

"Well," I said, "it's some consolation to be able to do something that you can't do."

Katie's blue eyes twinkled. "Maybe you think I can't."

"Skip it," I said. "You're not going kiting around on any fire truck. Not the way these lunatics drive."

At that instant the second alarm clanged in. "There's the deuce!" Spike shouted, and leaped toward the door.

I was on his heels and I realized, unhappily, that Katie was on mine. We tore down the corridor and into the fire house. The big pumper was just starting to roll. The three of us caught the hand rail and swung onto the running board. Two firemen up beside the driver looked back and yelled at Katie. The roar of the powerful engines drowned their words and the Duchess looked the other way.

As the pumper turned into the street with a breath-taking skid and roared away with bell clanging and siren wailing, Katie swayed toward me and shouted happily: "I've always wanted to do this."

"It's just the little girl in you," I growled.

We saw the red glow in the sky while we were still blocks away from the fire. Huge clouds of yellow smoke were rolling upward.

"Kurt Bergstrom's chemical plant is at Fourth and Chesnut," I yelled.

"Fine!" Spike shouted. "And if Bergstrom is going up in smoke with his chemicals, I'll buy the drinks."

Which is the way most newspaper men feel about Kurt Bergstrom. The head of the Bergstrom Chemical Company is an inventor, a nationally known chemist, a man of wealth and substance. But! He'll stoop to any gag, short of murder, to get his name in the papers. And reporters do not like publicity hounds.

The pumper pulled up a block from the fire. Katie and Spike and I piled off and started down the street as one of the firemen yelled: "Hey, Duchess! Next time you want to go to a fire, hire a cab!"

"Thanks for the buggy ride," Katie called sweetly, and blew him a kiss.

THE fire, we discovered with some disappointment, was confined to the north wing of the two-story brick building. It was evidently already under control, despite the billowing clouds of acrid smoke which rolled out of the shattered windows.

"Not much to this," I remarked.

Then we saw an elderly man talking excitedly to Battalion Chief Murphy. We pegged him for the night watchman and ran over.

"He was in the chem lab in the north wing when I come on at six," the old man was saying. "He was alone, workin' on some experiment. I goes over the plant and I'm down in my room makin' some coffee, when I smell smoke. That's about a half hour later. I runs upstairs and the whole chem lab is in flames. I never seen him go out. His car's right there in front of the office where he parked it, but he ain't nowheres around."

"Who?" Spike bellowed. "Who?"

The watchman blinked at us. "Mr.

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Hamlin. Mr. John Hamlin. He's Mr. Bergstrom's assistant in the lab."

Chief Murphy grunted. "Well, we'll find out if he's in there in a few minutes. I'll send in a couple of men with gas masks."

A little later they found the body, or what was left of it. They didn't even try to carry it out. They left that grisly job to the coroner. In the confined space of the laboratory the heat had been intense.

We cleaned up as many angles of the story as we could and then Spike called a cab. The Duchess, as usual, was right on our heels. She climbed into the taxi with us and sat down calmly between Spike and me.

Spike stared straight ahead as the cab pulled away from the curb. "My nose tells me it's still with us," he commented acidly.

"My Christmas Night perfume," Katie said blandly. "Don't you adore it?"

"I'd adore to drop you down a manhole," Spike groused.

She let that pass. "Are you by any chance going to the Hotel Drake?" she asked. "Because if you are, I'll go with you and we'll interview Kurt Bergstrom together."

Spike groaned, but didn't argue.

The clerk at the Drake directed us to the dining room and the head waiter told us Bergstrom was eating alone in the south alcove. Spike started off, then checked himself. A cagey look came into his eyes as he asked casually: "How long has Mr. Bergstrom been in the dining room?"

"Since a little after six, sir."

As we paraded through the room, a bit damp and sooty and bedraggled, Katie asked:

"Now what was the occasion for that question?"

"Did you ever hear, my little cabbage, of the crime called arson?"

"Yes," Katie said promptly, "and I've also heard of the crime called murder. But if you're thinking of them in connection with Kurt Bergstrom, you'd best forget them. Mr. Bergstrom is a wealthy man. He had no reason to stoop to arson, much less to murder."

"That mugg would stoop to anything to get his name in the papers."

BERGSTROM rose when he saw us coming. He's a heavy-set chap of fifty, with very pink cheeks, keen blue eyes and close-clipped blond hair.

"Goot evening, gentlemen. Goot evening, Miss Blayne." He knew every reporter in the city. "There is something I can do for you?"

"There sure is," Spike said. "Who is John Hamlin?"

"Hamlin is my assistant in the laboratory."

"Not any more he isn't your assistant." Spike never beat around the bush. "The north wing of your plant was just gutted by fire. Hamlin was burned to death, or so the watchman believes. Anyway, the firemen found a body in the lab. Hamlin's car is out in front but Hamlin is missing."

Bergstrom took it calmly but that didn't prove anything. He's the type who never shows emotion.

"Now about this man Hamlin," Spike hurried on. "Was he married?"

"Yes. He lived with his wife at 17 Bay Terrace."

"Why was he down there after hours?"

"An experimental chemist," Bergstrom proclaimed, "has no hours. He was working nights on an experiment of his own. Only during the day did he help me with one of my inventions."

"Which is?"

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Bergstrom brightened. "An inexpensive device for recording sound on motion picture film. An attachment for the home movie camera, selling for only a few dollars, which—"

"Give the details to the advertising department," Spike broke in. "We're not handing out any free publicity for your invention." He paused, looked the big German straight in the eye. "Do you believe, Mr. Bergstrom, that the body found was John Hamlin's?"

Bergstrom shrugged, said cautiously: "You say Hamlin iss missing und a body was found in the laboratory. Surely you, as a brilliant young newspaper man, should be able to draw the obvious conclusion."

"But perhaps," Spike said slowly, "the conclusion is too *damned* obvious!" He glared at the bristling Bergstrom. "Have you stopped to think of that?"

"I haff hardly had time," Bergstrom retorted stiffly, "to think of anything. Und now if you excuse me please, I run oud to the plant."

We followed him out of the dining room. In the lobby Katie asked: "Are you going out to see Mrs. Hamlin?"

"Yes, *darling!*" Spike shot back. "And I suppose you'd like to tag along."

"Yes, *dear*! I'd love it. You know how I enjoy your company."

WE found Mrs. Hamlin dry-eyed and calm, though we knew immediately we saw her that she had been informed of her husband's death. She was a tall, big-boned woman with black hair that looked dyed and dark, close-set eyes.

She invited us into the living room and asked us to sit down. "I knew that those experiments would end in tragedy," she told us calmly. "You see, my husband was developing a high explosive."

"So far as anyone knows," Spike pointed out, "there was no explosion."

"The chemicals he used were highly inflammable."

"I see." Spike didn't look as though he saw at all. "Did your husband come home for dinner tonight, Mrs Hamlin?"

"He came home, yes. He ate an early dinner, as always, and rushed back to the laboratory. He must have got there a little before six. I did my dishes and sat down and tried to read. I had planned to go to a movie. But, somehow, I didn't dare leave the house. I was sitting here on the Chesterfield when the coroner phoned. I was neither surprised nor shocked. You see, I have been expecting this." She wiped her dry eyes with a folded handkerchief. "I suppose you will want pictures?"

She turned to a table, picked up three large snapshots and handed them to me. "They were taken a year ago today. Our wedding day."

Well, it should have been pretty pathetic, but somehow it wasn't. I looked at the pictures. Mr. and Mrs. John Hamlin on somebody's lawn. A little guy with a head too big for his stooped shoulders, his thin arm held in the possessive grip of a smirking, overdressed Amazon.

Spike asked quietly: "Did Mr. Hamlin carry any insurance?"

"Yes. He took it out before we were married."

"A large amount?"

"Eighty thousand dollars."

Spike peered around the room. "Quite a sizable policy for a man in his circumstances, wouldn't you say?"

I could see her stiffen as she glared at Spike. "Considering the dangers of

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his work, no. He wished me to be provided for if anything happened."

"Well, we'll hope his wish is granted," Spike said, rubbing a smile off his lips. "Although insurance companies sometimes get tough about things like this. Any further questions, —children? If not, that will be all, Mrs. Hamlin. Sorry to trouble you, and thanks for the pictures."

We filed out, climbed into our cab and started back to the Hall.

"What a story, what a story!" Spike chortled. "If we can only crack it!"

"You mean this poor woman's losing her husband on their wedding anniversary?" Katie asked.

Spike moaned. "Brilliance. That's it. Positive brilliance. Duchess, don't you know a Schwartz when one jumps up and spits in your face?"

"A Schwartz?"

"Tell her, Pinky. She was still in kindergarden when the Schwartz case broke."

"This Schwartz was a chemist and inventor too," I said. "He had a laboratory out in Walnut Creek where he was working on a process for manufacturing artificial silk. One night there was an explosion and the joint burned down. They found a man's body in the ashes. Everybody thought, of course, that Schwartz had cashed his checks. His wife put in for the hundred grand insurance he carried.

"Then it developed that the body wasn't Schwartz's at all. The dead guy was an itinerant preacher whom the chemist had lured into the laboratory and knocked over the head. Schwartz, in the meantime, had holed up in an apartment he'd rented weeks before he pulled the hoax. The dicks got on his trail and were closing in on him when Schwartz put a .45 slug between his eyes. Since then, Katie, an insurance hoax of that type has been known as a Schwartz."

The Duchess took one of my cigarettes and lit it with hands that weren't very steady. "And you think this is an insurance hoax?"

"Cinch," Spike declared flatly.

"Why?"

"Because it's too damned pat and because that guy Hamlin carried too much insurance."

"And who was the man they found in the laboratory?"

"Some hobo who'll never be missed. Hamlin got him in there on the pretext of giving him a job, slapped him over the conk and fired the joint. Simple, Duchess."

"And you think Kurt Bergstrom was in on the hoax?" Katie pursued.

"Cinch." Spike nodded gleefully. "The way I dope it, the time of the fire was prearranged to put Bergstrom in the clear. John Hamlin is a weak sister and the whole plot was cooked up by Bergstrom and Mrs. Hamlin. Hamlin is safely holed up somewhere, and when the heat is off he and the dame'll scram to South America with forty grand."

"And the other forty grand?"

"Into Kurt Bergstrom's sock. Well, what do you think of it, Duchess?"

"I think the whole thing," Katie promptly retorted, "is a silly machination of a disordered brain."

WHEN we got back to the press room I called the beat while Spike and the Duchess phoned their offices. Then, on a hunch, I rang the morgue and by sheer good luck got hold of the coroner himself.

"Pinky Kane," I said. "Look, coroner. About that man who was burned to death in the Bergstrom fire. Have you got around to a p.m. yet?"

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"We've made a cursory examination at the request of Captain Wallis."

"What'd you find?"

"Perhaps you'd better ask Wallis. He ordered me not to give out any details."

Katie and Spike were still in the phone booths as I impatiently jiggled the hook, got the operator and asked for the Captain of Detectives. Wallis came on almost immediately.

"This is Kane, skipper. Understand you ordered a post mortem on Hamlin's body."

"That's right, Pinky."

"What'd you find out?"

"Well, his height and build approximate that of John Hamlin. He carried a gold watch on which Hamlin's initials are still discernible. He wore a full denture—not a tooth in his head. Same as Hamlin. And that, Kane, is about the works."

"Come on, skipper. Kick in."

"I said that was the works."

"Now look here. You were on that Schwartz case and so was I. And I haven't forgotten it. Now what else did your medical examiner discover when he went over that body? Tell me everything."

"Well," Captain Wallis sighed, "you'll get it sooner or later, so I might as well give it to you now. The man's skull had been fractured."

"Uh-huh, I thought you were holding out something like that. Hamlin's skull couldn't have been cracked in the fire, could it?"

"Chief Murphy said nothing fell on him and if he had a fractured skull he must have got it before the fire broke out."

"Well, what do you think?" I asked.

"I don't know how you spotted it, Pinky, but I think you're on the right track. Another Schwartz."

"How about Bergstrom? Do you think he's in on it?"

"If I answered that question I'd be guessing. So let's pass it."

"And Mrs. Hamlin?"

"I've only talked to her on the phone. She may be a party to the hoax and she may not. Probably not. Schwartz's wife wasn't, you know. He planned to contact her after the pay-off and, as the saying goes, tell all. Anyway, I've just sent out an all-state teletype with Hamlin's description. I've ordered him held."

"On what charge, skipper?"

"Murder, my boy. Murder," Captain Wallis said cheerfully.

I hung up, a bit breathless all of a sudden.

The Captain certainly had been working fast.

Katie came out of the *Sun* booth. "You've been talking to Bodie Wallis, haven't you?" she said, smiling.

"Bodie did most of the talking. I listened. He's sent out an all-state teletype to pick up John Hamlin."

Katie's laugh told me what she thought of Bodie Wallis. "John Hamlin has already been picked up. In a basket, by a couple of coroner's deputies."

"Captain Wallis doesn't think so."

"String with Captain Wallis, Pinky, and you'll sleep in the street," she said airily.

Spike tumbled out of the telephone booth bellowing:

"Hey, Pink! The office just got a flash from Duke Wayland on the lower beat. Captain Wallis—"

"I know. I was just talking to him."

"That guy had a fractured skull!" Spike exclaimed excitedly.

"Yeah," I said.

Katie's jaw dropped as she looked from Spike to me. "What guy had a

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fractured skull?" she asked in a small voice.

"The guy they picked up in a basket. The guy you were dumb enough to think was John Hamlin."

KATIE sat down abruptly. Spike and I stood looking at her, gloating a little. It wasn't often that the Duchess put her money on the wrong number.

"Well, muh frand?" Spike grinned at last.

She shrugged. "It looks bad but it isn't hopeless. I'm banking on one thing: the integrity of Kurt Bergstrom. I've known him for several years and I can't see him getting mixed up in an insurance hoax involving murder. And I can't see that meek and mild person, John Hamlin, hitting a man over the head and burning his body."

"That's logic for you," Spike jeered. "Kurt Bergstrom looks too honest to go in for murder. And John Hamlin looks too meek to kill anybody. Forget, for a minute, the looks of those two guys and where are you? Well, I'll tell you. You're stringing along with Pinky and me and Captain Wallis."

"Three," Katie said sarcastically, "of the most brilliant minds in the city. Well, if you three are brilliant, I'm a low moron. Good night."

Katie breezed, slamming the door.

Spike chuckled. "Did we get the little lady's goat, all right. But I'd much rather get John Hamlin."

"And maybe you think we won't. Now look. It's a ten to one shot the guy never left the city. His best bet was to establish a residence in some quiet apartment house. He's probably had the apartment for weeks, just like Schwartz did. All right. So what?"

"I'll bite."

"We smoke him out."

"You and me?"

"Don't be a sap. We got a staff, haven't we. We got three or four cubs sitting over there in the office wearing out the seats of their pants, haven't we? Oke! Tomorrow morning early we turn 'em loose, along with anybody else Andy can spare. We contact every hotel and apartment and rooming house in the city."

"The dicks will be doing just that," I pointed out.

"What of it? We can put as many men on the job as Bodie Wallis. We got just as good a chance as he has of turning up Hamlin. And if we get a break—well, will Katie's face be red? Dunt esk!"

WE went to work the next morning. It was house-to-house stuff and it was tiring. But we didn't care. Spike and I felt, the whole *Telegram* staff felt, that we were on the right track.

As we read John Hamlin's mind, he never expected any hue and cry. He thought the corpse would be accepted as his, and the pay-off would be a push-over. He'd made only one mistake. He'd hit the poor devil he'd hired to double for him too hard a blow. The body wasn't wholly consumed, as he'd expected it to be, and the skull fracture showed up in the post mortem. John Hamlin, we reasoned, must have got quite a shock when he read the papers in the morning and learned that every law enforcement officer in the state was looking for him.

It was a long hard day and we found no trace of John Hamlin. Something, however, was in our blood. The thrill of the chase. We felt, Spike and I and the cubs, as though surely we'd locate him in the next apartment house, the

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next hotel. We kept doggedly at it all day, all the day following, all the day after that.

At five in the afternoon of the third day, dead on my feet, I strolled into the City Hall press room. The reporters on the afternoon papers had gone home and Katie, looking fresh and spruce and more than a little like a million dollars, was all alone.

"You looked dragged out, Pinky," she smiled. "Where have you been all day?"

"Hunting John Hamlin," I said, slumping into a chair.

"Why, don't you read the papers? Hamlin was buried today. I covered the funeral."

I sighed. "You don't really think that was Hamlin, do you? I know you're silly, Duchess, and I know your judgment isn't very good. But you're not that silly, are you?"

She looked at me hard for a long minute. Then:

"See here, Pinky Kane. I don't like that. I don't like it even a little bit. You can call me almost anything else, but I draw the line at being called silly. I was going to spare you this, but on second thought I won't. I'll go out of my way, for once, just to show you how silly *you* are. Will you meet me at the Drake Hotel at eight tonight?"

"What for?"

"For the pay-off," Katie said.

The door had opened and Spike Kaylor stood on the threshold. "Where's the pay-off?" he demanded.

"At the Drake, tonight," the Duchess told him. "You're invited."

"Thanks," Spike grinned. "Will this affair be formal, or shall I—"

"Wear tails, by all means," Katie shot back, and left the room.

"What's the kid got on her mind?" Spike asked.

"You can't prove anything by me."

"Do you really think she has a hot lead?"

"I wouldn't put it beyond her."

"But what is it? She hasn't found John Hamlin, has she?"

"No. She insists Hamlin is dead and buried."

"But maybe that's just to throw us off the track." Spike eased into a chair. "Pay-off, huh? Pay-off," he mused. "Pink, there's something screwy about this picture. If she was ready to crack this story, would she invite us to the party? Not any! She'd tell us something was due to pop and let us stew in our own juices until two o'clock tomorrow morning when the final edition of the *Sun* comes out."

"That's what you'd think, all right. So what?"

"So we take her up. What the hell else can we do?"

We found the Duchess, sitting off by herself, in the lobby of the Drake at eight o'clock.

"Well, keed, when does the curtain go up?" Spike asked.

"Almost any minute," Katie returned shortly. "Just keep your shirts on and your mouths shut."

She lit a fresh cigarette off a glowing butt.

Her hands were shaking and I saw that the palms were moist. Her eyes were bright, feverish, as she kept watching the door.

"Our little pal seems a bit nervous," Spike grinned.

"We can do without your puerile mouthings for a while, Mr. Kaylor," the Duchess told him.

THEN Kurt Bergstrom strode into the lobby and Katie rose. The chemist spotted her and came over. He looked keyed up and he didn't smile

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as he bowed perfunctorily over her hand.

"These are your friends?" he asked, looking at Spike and me with cold and fishy eyes.

"Not my friends, but they'll do as witnesses."

"Goot! Bring them up in ten minutes."

Bergstrom turned and walked briskly toward the elevators. Katie sat down and lit another cigarette. She was plenty nervous.

I began to feel restive myself. Even Spike, who is almost irrepressible, didn't have anything to say. We watched ten slow minutes tick off on the clock over the desk. Then Katie stood up.

"When we go up to Bergstrom's room," she said, "you two will do as you're told and ask no questions. Have you got that straight?"

"Oke, kid," Spike nodded. "Lead the way."

Bergstrom received us in the living room of his suite. He waved Katie to a chair and then stood for a minute eying Spike and me. You could see he didn't like us. You could see he wished we were a long way from there. Finally he said:

"I hope we can trust them, Miss Blayne."

"They'll do as they're told and like it," the Duchess said.

"That all depends," Spike said, "on what you tell us to do."

Bergstrom threw open a door to a clothes closet. "You will go in there und stay there und keep quiet," he said crisply. "You will leaf the door oben two or three inches, joost enough so you can see und hear what goes on. You will nod come oudt until you are told to come oudt. All right?"

"All right," Spike agreed.

"I will tell you when to go in. In the meantime, please to sit down und be comfortable."

We sat down diffidently. So help me, I couldn't get the angle. I couldn't make head or tail of the layout. Spike caught my eye, while Bergstrom paced briskly up and down the room, and signalled: "Watch yourself. I don't trust this guy." I didn't trust him either.

After a time the telephone rang. Bergstrom took it up, listened a moment, ordered: "Show him up at once."

Spike started to rise.

"No, no. Nod yet," Bergstrom said irritably. "It iss only Captain Wallis."

Spike sat down again, looking a bit deflated. Bodie Wallis came in after a few minutes. In his quiet blue serge business suit, he didn't look much like a detective.

He nodded to Katie and Bergstrom, grinned at Spike and me.

"You two boys don't miss anything, do you?" he chuckled.

"Not if we can help it," Spike admitted, a bit boastfully.

"I might point out," Katie remarked, "that they are here at my invitation. And anything they see or hear won't be reported in the *Telegram* until it has appeared exclusively in the *Sun*. Right, Mr. Kaylor?"

"Wrong, Miss Blayne!" Spike bristled. "That wasn't part of the bargain."

"It's part of the bargain now."

"Sister, it takes two to make a bargain. And as long as I have two legs and can run to the nearest telephone—"

THE phone buzzed at that instant and Bergstrom raised his hand authoritatively. "Silence, if you please!" He picked up the instrument,

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said after a moment: "Show her up at once."

He turned and waved us toward the closet. We got up and went in and closed the door to a two-inch crack. Spike jammed his foot against the door and I pulled on the knob, to hold it steady open. Spike, kneeling at the crack, whispered:

"It's a funny one, Pink. You got any ideas?"

"No ideas, but I got a good hunch," I whispered. "Bergstrom is on the spot. With Katie's unwitting help, he's trying to slide out from under."

"Yeah. That's the way I dope it. He's about to pull a fast one. And when it comes down the groove, we'll pole it over the right-field fence for a home run. How's about it?"

"That's oke by me."

We didn't say any more, because Bergstrom had stepped to the hall door and was admitting—Mrs. John Hamlin! She wore black and she looked tense and watchful and cool. Bergstrom was saying:

"Miss Blayne you haff met, I believe. Und this, Mrs. Hamlin iss Mr. Wallis."

Mister Wallis! Well, why not? The whole situation was cockeyed anyway.

"Please to sit down, Mrs. Hamlin," Bergstrom said, helping her to a chair with great solicitude. "We haff wonderful news for you. Your husband, my dear, iss *alive*!"

Mrs. Hamlin sat on the edge of her chair, stiffly, blinking up at him. She said carefully: "I buried my husband this afternoon."

Bergstrom smiled down at her gently, shook his head. "The man you buried vas nod your husband. John iss alive. He vas badly burned in the fire und he sustained a severe injury to the head. He hass been suffering from amnesia ever since. In fact, even now he iss delirious. But the doctor assures me that his chances for pulling through are excellent."

The woman never moved but I could see the last of the color in her cheeks fade out.

Spike whispered: "Amnesia! Did I tell you a fast one was coming down the groove? Amnesia!"

Well, it was easy enough for a couple of smart reporters to dope the play. I saw it this way: When Bergstrom and Hamlin realized their hoax wasn't going over, they got together and devised this amnesia gag. Burned Hamlin with a little acid, probably. Cooked up a good story. "I don't remember anything that happened till I woke up in the hospital." That sort of thing—it's pulled every day.

YES, it was all pretty smart. Just about the type of stuff you'd expect a bright lad like Herr Bergstrom to pull. Having Captain Wallis there on the job was just the right touch. It showed the supreme confidence and egoism of the chemist.

"I feel certain there has been some mistake," Mrs. Hamlin said slowly, gripping the arms of her chair. "I did not see John's body. I did not want to look at it. But I knew, as I sat there staring at the coffin this afternoon, that my husband was in it."

"But," Bergstrom pointed out calmly, "there iss no way you *could* know, Mrs. Hamlin. No way in the world, because—John iss in bed in the next room. Alive. Delirious, seriously burned, very ill—but *alive*!"

He shouted that last word in a way that sent a chill down my spine—even though I'd suspected all along that Hamlin wasn't dead.

And then all at once I was conscious

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of a voice from the room on the far side. Someone in there had been talking for quite a while, talking very softly. And now, as Spike and I and the people in the living room listened, the voice grew louder. We could catch a word or two: "Valence of three.... calcium chloride . . . neutralized . . ."

What a shock to that woman who was sitting there so white and rigid. A voice, literally, from the dead!

I felt my hair standing on end. I heard Spike's fast and unsteady breathing. I could feel his body shaking with the tension of nerves about to snap. Let me tell you, it was electric!

Bergstrom stepped to the other door. He threw it open. The room was dark but we heard that rasping voice going on monotonously: ". . . carbon union in the aliphatic hydrocarbons has apparently the same effect on the boiling point as two hydrogen atoms. But as I was telling you, Kurt, an acetylenic or triple linkage is associated with a rise in the boiling point. However . . ."

Mrs. Hamlin was on her feet, staring into the darkened room. She screamed: "No! No!"

Bergstrom said patiently, gently: "But yes, Mrs. Hamlin. Surely you recognize John's voice."

The woman caught the arm of a chair, steadied herself. "I tell you," she cried hysterically, "John is *dead*!"

"No. John iss very much alive."

Bergstrom reached inside the door, flipped the switch. The bedroom was bright with light. Looking straight across the living room, I could see a figure in the bed. I caught a glimpse of a head swathed in bandages. I saw lips moving. I heard the deadly monotonous voice going on and on.

". . . true of the fatty acid series, Kurt, and the corresponding ketones and . . ."

THEN the bedroom door was blocked by the angular figure of Mrs. Hamlin. She swayed against the frame, caught herself, screamed: "No, no, I tell you! It can't be true! He can't be alive! I killed him myself with a hammer. I got into the plant with a key to the back door. I've had it for months. I crept up behind him. I knocked him down. I poured gasoline over him and struck a match. I saw him burn. *I saw him burn*!"

All this in a wild screech that sent icy chills up and down my spine. John Hamlin's voice went on:

". . . although, Kurt, the correlation of melting point with constitution has not . . ."

The tall woman covered her face with her angular hands She screamed through her bony fingers: "*I tell you I killed him!*"

Then she dropped in a dead faint.

". . . symmetry of the resulting molecule may exert such a lowering effect that the final result . . ."

"Westoby!" Bergstrom yelled. "Ged oud uf bed und turn that damn' thing off. If I haff to listen to John Hamlin's voice one minute longer I shall haff hysterics!"

Well, after Mrs. Hamlin had snapped out of her faint and Captain Wallis had taken her away, we were all pretty limp. Bergstrom brought out a bottle and some ice, and we all sat down and tried to come back to earth. The chemist remarked finally:

"Fortunately, Hamlin had been helping me with my sount devize. I suppose I haff a mile or two uf film on which his voice iss recorded."

Westoby, who is one of the chemist's lab men, added: "Lucky, too, the film was stored in the physical laboratory in the south wing, which the fire didn't touch."

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The Duchess was smiling. "And speaking of luck, wasn't it a break that I brushed against Mrs. Hamlin's coat in her hallway the other night?"

"Huh?" Spike grunted. "What's Mrs. Hamlin's coat got to do with it?"

"It was wet, darling," Katie said pleasantly. "There were beads of rain on the fur collar. And Mrs. Hamlin had told us she hadn't left the house that evening."

"Look here!" Spike snorted. "Do you mean to tell me you had the play doped from the beginning?"

"I had it doped, as you put it, within an hour or two after I brushed against that wet coat."

"Well, Duchess, I got to hand it to you. You're the top." He drained his glass and stood up. "Bergstrom, you've put on a grand show and we'll give your sound recorder a million dollars' worth of publicity. Now I've got to hit a phone with the story. Okay to use yours?"

"No," Bergstrom said steadily. "It iss most decidedly nod okay to use mine."

"Huh?" Spike gasped. "Wha-zat?"

Bergstrom, still smiling, bowed to Katie. And the Duchess rose.

"Mr. Bergstrom has ordered the operator to accept no out-going calls," she informed us. "So if you want to give your office the story, Spike, you'll have to find another telephone."

She moved toward the door, adding over her shoulder: "If you can, and that will be quite a job!"

"If I can!" Spike bellowed, and started after her. "While I've got the use of my legs, I guess—"

Katie threw open the door. Lounging in the hall outside I caught a glimpse of half a dozen of the toughest looking punks I ever saw outside of a penitentiary—or a morning paper's circulation department. Spike stopped in his tracks.

"Keep them here, boys, until midnight," the Duchess ordered cheerfully. "And try not to hurt them too badly if they make a break."

"We won't hurt 'em, Miss Katie," a big bruiser grinned. "Not *much*!"

Well, they didn't hurt us—because we didn't make a break. We stayed there till midnight, drinking very good whisky with Kurt Bergstrom and wondering where we ever got the idea that the Duchess was silly, and dumb, and slow on the pick-up.

Steals Five Truck Loads in Four Years

KLEPTOMANIACS are persons who cannot resist the impulse to steal. Many shoplifters properly belong in this class and, although money may mean nothing to them, they continue to lift things from the stores and homes which they visit. One psychological treatment which has been found to be effective is to get the kleptomaniac interested in collecting as a hobby which enables theft to be avoided.

Some kleptomaniacs are able to steal over a period of years and escape detection. As an example, a kleptomaniac of Woodburn, Oregon, lifted things for four years and the quantity of the stolen merchandise was so great that five truck loads were carried from his home when he was finally caught.

—*John Berry.*

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ILLUSTRATED
CRIMES
by STOOKIE ALLEN
THE CLUE OF THE
FOLDED DOLLAR
WHEN LOUISE B. GERRISH, PRETTY TEACHER OF AMHERST CORNERS, MAINE, WAS MYSTERIOUSLY SLAIN IN MAY, 1924, IT SEEMED THAT HER MURDER WOULD REMAIN IN THE RECORDS AS UNSOLVED, HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE CHANCE CLUE OF A WORN DOLLAR BILL, FOLDED LENGTHWISE IN UNUSUAL FASHION.
Louise Gerrish
ON MAY 21, MISS GERRISH FAILED TO APPEAR AT HER SCHOOL HOUSE AND SOON WORD SPREAD THAT SHE HAD LEFT HER LODGINGS THE PREVIOUS EVENING TO MAIL A LETTER AND HADN'T RETURNED. THE VILLAGERS ORGANIZED A SEARCHING PARTY. ONE OF HER OWN PUPILS FOUND HER BODY IN A SHALLOW GRAVE, CRUDELY DUG, IN A THICKET. SHE HAD BEEN KILLED BY A BLAST FROM A SHOTGUN. HER PURSE WAS MISSING, ALSO HER WATCH AND RINGS.
JOSEPH R. WOOD, NOTED BOSTON DETECTIVE, AGREED THAT ROBBERY HAD PROBABLY IMPELLED THE CRIME AND THAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN DONE BY A VILLAGER. THE FIRST PEOPLE HE QUESTIONED WERE RUSSELL WILLIAMS, SON OF THE FARMER WITH WHOM MISS GERRISH BOARDED, AND RONALD McDONALD, A 15-YEAR-OLD BOY WHO DID CHORES ABOUT THE FARM. RUSSELL, AN UPSTANDING LOGGER, HAD BEEN ATTRACTED TO MISS GERRISH, BUT THERE HAD BEEN NO LOVE AFFAIR, AND HE COULD NOT BE LINKED WITH THE CRIME. AND McDONALD, PUPIL OF THE SLAIN TEACHER, TOLD WOOD THAT IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE THAT ANYBODY SHOULD WANT TO KILL A NICE GIRL LIKE MISS GERRISH.

COMING SOON—

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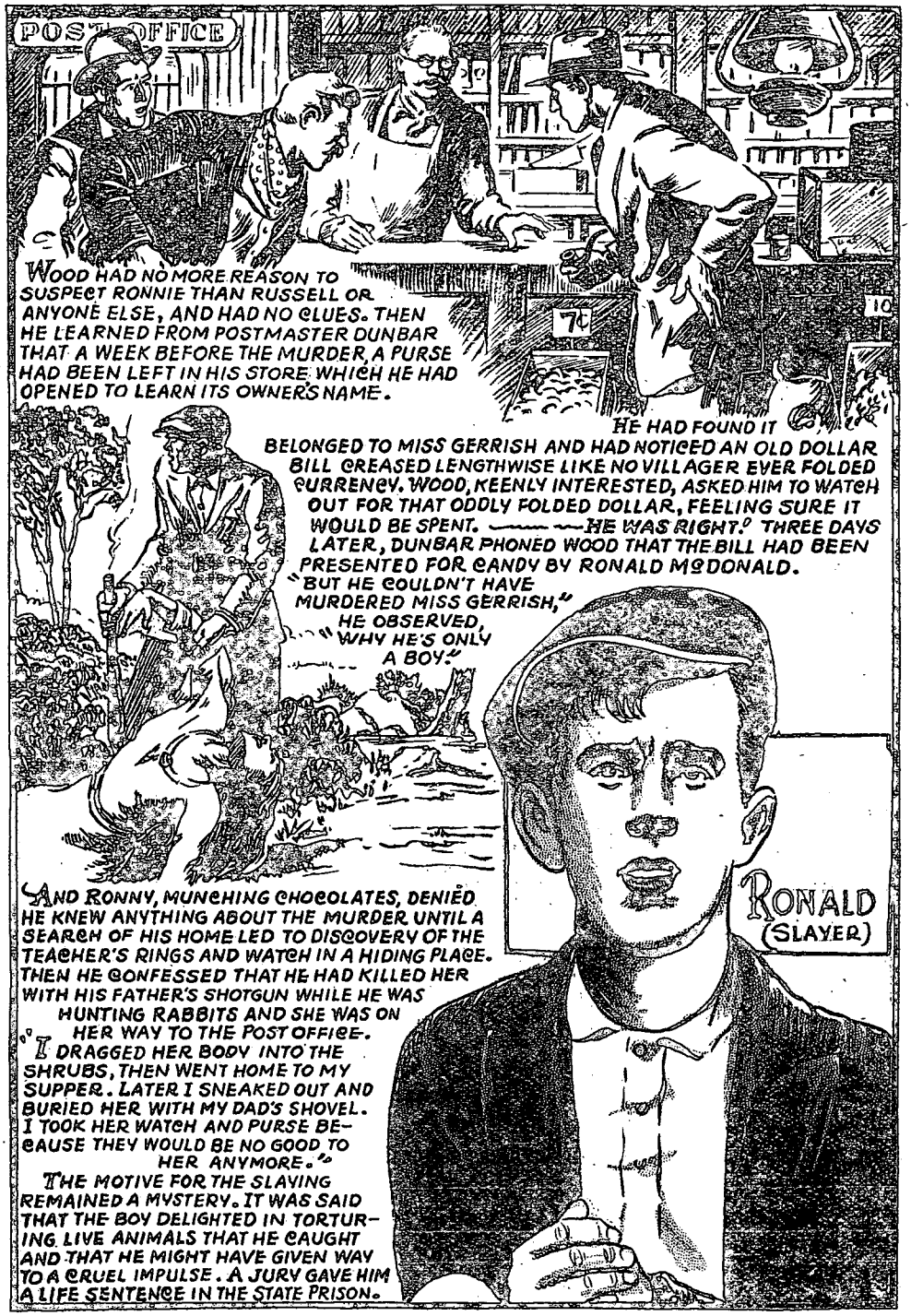
POST OFFICE
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WOOD HAD NO MORE REASON TO SUSPECT RONNIE THAN RUSSELL OR ANYONE ELSE, AND HAD NO CLUES. THEN HE LEARNED FROM POSTMASTER DUNBAR THAT A WEEK BEFORE THE MURDER, A PURSE HAD BEEN LEFT IN HIS STORE WHICH HE HAD OPENED TO LEARN ITS OWNER'S NAME.
HE HAD FOUND IT BELONGED TO MISS GERRISH AND HAD NOTICED AN OLD DOLLAR BILL CREASED LENGTHWISE LIKE NO VILLAGER EVER FOLDED CURRENCY. WOOD, KEENLY INTERESTED, ASKED HIM TO WATCH OUT FOR THAT ODDLY FOLDED DOLLAR, FEELING SURE IT WOULD BE SPENT. —— —HE WAS RIGHT.' THREE DAYS LATER, DUNBAR PHONED WOOD THAT THE BILL HAD BEEN PRESENTED FOR CANDY BY RONALD McDONALD.
"BUT HE COULDN'T HAVE MURDERED MISS GERRISH," HE OBSERVED, "WHY HE'S ONLY A BOY!"
RONALD (SLAYER)
AND RONNY, MUNCHING CHOCOLATES, DENIED HE KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT THE MURDER UNTIL A SEARCH OF HIS HOME LED TO DISCOVERY OF THE TEACHER'S RINGS AND WATCH IN A HIDING PLACE. THEN HE CONFESSED THAT HE HAD KILLED HER WITH HIS FATHER'S SHOTGUN WHILE HE WAS HUNTING RABBITS AND SHE WAS ON HER WAY TO THE POST OFFICE.
"I DRAGGED HER BODY INTO THE SHRUBS, THEN WENT HOME TO MY SUPPER. LATER I SNEAKED OUT AND BURIED HER WITH MY DAD'S SHOVEL. I TOOK HER WATCH AND PURSE BECAUSE THEY WOULD BE NO GOOD TO HER ANYMORE."
THE MOTIVE FOR THE SLAYING REMAINED A MYSTERY. IT WAS SAID THAT THE BOY DELIGHTED IN TORTURING LIVE ANIMALS THAT HE CAUGHT AND THAT HE MIGHT HAVE GIVEN WAY TO A CRUEL IMPULSE. A JURY GAVE HIM A LIFE SENTENCE IN THE STATE PRISON.

THE TORCH MURDER

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A Silencer for Firearms Is by No Means the Swift, Undetectable Force That Gangland Believes. Here We Present the Facts Concerning This Deadly and Misunderstood Device

DFW FACT SPECIAL ARTICLE

Outlawed Silence

By Steve McGee

THE subject of silencers for firearms is one obscured by an amazing variety of misinformation. The present article is, I believe, the first in print endeavoring to present the facts concerning this misunderstood device.

The subject of silencers is, also, one which many lovers of guns wish had never come up. There are sportsmen who regret that the contraption was ever invented. Some men who consider firearms fine instruments to be admired and treasured would rather not talk about it at all. The United States Revolver Association, a body

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governing hand gun shooting as a sport, and one vitally interested in the right of all reputable citizens to have arms, feels that the silencer has encouraged crime and helped to glorify the gangster.

This article is not, however, a lesson in how to commit a murder with a silenced gun and get away with it. In fact, the total effect of this item on anyone harboring such a malevolent notion will be decidedly discouraging. On the other hand I cannot concur with those gunsmiths, with whom I attempter to discuss the matter, who seem to feel that knowing about silencers is almost as reprehensible as using one. As readers of detective stories, with an academic interest in all such devices, we are entitled to know the facts.

Writers of detective stories, it must be pointed out, are largely responsible for the unsavory reputation of the silencer and for the appalling amount of misinformation concerning it. The silencer was introduced into fiction soon after its invention in a play which is now long forgotten. Whether the play was a success I do not know, but the silencer itself was a sensation. It seemed to exert a romantic fascination upon the general mind as a swift, soundless, undetectable force. Forthwith detective story writers seized joyfully upon it. Silencers have played an important part in a countless number of crime tales. In most cases the authors employed it with a fine disregard of the technical verities. If truth be known, the silencer is more sinned against than sinning.

This situation has come to such a pass, with error piled upon error, that few know exactly what a silencer can and cannot do. Popular delusions have endowed it with magical qualities which it does not possess. What follows will soon show that, due to technical limitations, the silencer has been of small use to criminals.

Certainly the inventor of the silencer, the late Hiram Percy Maxim, had no intention of placing a new advantage in the hands of the underworld. He designed the silencer for use with tight-breech weapons, that is to say with rifles. Everyone knows that the rifle is by no means the favorite weapon of the crook, especially when its unwieldy length is extended by the attachment of this device. Maxim's invention was developed for certain military advantages.

A silencer reduces the recoil of a rifle about seventy-five per cent, which eliminates flinching and enables the marksman to make a higher score, especially when a second emergency shot must quickly follow the first. It eliminates the flash, so that firing of the military rifle is not visible in the dark. I know of no army, however, which ever went in for silencers.

A device similar to the silencer in producing these advantages, as well as in general appearance, is called the Cutts compensator. It is used in trap, field or skeet shooting in order to lessen the recoil, increase accuracy of fire and lengthen barrel life. It must be specially fitted and can be used on comparatively few guns—on 12, 16 or 20 gauge shotguns, single barrel, single shot, autoloading, and on some high power rifles of calibre .30. The compensator is legally obtainable, though the silencer generally is not.

The outlawing of the silencer is due admittedly to the part it has played in the drama of crime. The most recent well-known case involving the use of a silencer was that of the Millen gang which, while robbing the Paramount Theatre, in Lynn, Mass., killed C. Fred

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Summers, a bill poster, with a fitted weapon. The records of Sing Sing show that one Reisling, operating in Hartford, Conn., came to grief for equipping the weapons of the New York underworld with silencers—incidentally, receiving his pay in "hot shorts," that is to say, stolen cars. No reputable gun manufacturer or gunsmith will, of course, fit a silencer to a gun. In at least one state it is a criminal offence even to own a firearm which has been threaded to receive a silencer.

HIRAM PERCY MAXIM invented the silencer in 1908. This device for suppressing the sound of discharge of firearms, when attached to a tight-breech weapon, such as a rifle, checks the sudden liberation of the power gases into the atmosphere. It functions in a manner very similar to the muffler of an automobile motor. Its baffle plates impart a whirling motion to the gases, causing them to be discharged through the center hole by centrifugal force. Because they escape slowly, they escape noiselessly, or almost so. The device also serves as a series of acoustical chambers which trap the sound frequencies of the discharge by setting up interfering resonances.

Before taking up the matter of the use of a silencer on a firearm, let's consider briefly the subject of firearm acoustics. In simpler language, let's see what happens when a gun goes off. Noise, of course, but not merely one noise, in most cases. More often than not there are two reports, and sometimes a third sound as well.

The violent expansion of the power gases from the barrel of a firearm, plus the violent displacement of the air around the muzzle, is called the muzzle blast. These sound impulses travel spherically. That is, they go in all directions at once, and at a speed of 1,090 feet per second. A person hearing a muzzle report alone gets a fairly accurate idea of the source of the sound, provided his hearing is normal, and depending on his experience.

It is the function of the silencer to swallow up the muzzle blast. This, in all cases, does it. But, unfortunately, the elimination of noise generated by a gun is not as simple as all that. Consider next the bow-wave report.

Bullets traveling at a speed higher than the velocity of sound hurl aside the air particles along the trajectory with violence enough to produce another characteristic sound. This is the bow-wave report, which is a noise exactly like the crack of a whip-lash. Whenever the velocity of a bullet exceeds that of sound, the bow-wave report is produced.

No gun can shoot noiselessly, therefore, even if it is equipped with a silencer, if its bullet travels faster than 1,090 feet per second. Most pistols and revolvers do not cause a bow-wave report because the speed of their bullets is too slow. Concerning rifles, however, the only ammunition with a bullet velocity slower than the velocity of sound is the .22 calibre. Every other rifle cartridge of which I have knowledge creates a bullet velocity fast enough to produce the bow-wave report. Obviously no silencer can eliminate this noise.

AT long ranges, when there is no bow-wave report, there is the whizz of the bullet, which also cannot be eradicated. If there is a bow-wave report, it blankets the whizz. Sometimes these sounds get mixed up. For instance, a man with a military rifle has just fired a shot at you from

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a distance of 2,000 meters. I am happy to say that he misses you. What do you hear? First, the bow-wave report originating from the early trajectory. Then the whizz of the bullet from the late trajectory, after it had slowed below the speed of sound. Last, the flat muzzle blast.

All this is pertinent to the subject of the use of silencers, an important part of the answer to the question of what good are they. Let me illustrate. Step up and meet Mr. Marksman. Now, considering this magazine page as a rough map, we station Mr. Marksman at the middle of the bottom edge. He has a rifle which he aims directly north. His line of fire, therefore, is the white line between the two columns of type. He is aiming at a target at the upper edge of the page. In a moment he is going to pull the trigger.

Now shake hands with Mr. Bystander. We place Mr. Bystander at the right edge of the page, near the top, say eight or ten lines down. Mr. Bystander cannot see Mr. Marksman. In fact, he is not aware that Mr. Marksman is anywhere in the neighborhood. The column of type separating these two men is, we'll say, rolling woodland. We now give Mr. Marksman the signal, and he fires his rifle. Question: What does Mr. Bystander hear?

He hears, first of all, the bow-wave report originated by the fast bullet at a point approximately two-thirds of the way up the page. Mr. Bystander, like all of us, perceives the source of the sound to be at right angles to the sound waves. When asked to indicate the position of the gun which fired, his senses trick him. He points to a spot far removed from Mr. Marksman's actual position—somewhere, to be more definite, about the middle of the left edge of the page. Mr. Bystander confuses the bow-wave report with the muzzle-blast. If, like most persons, he is not aware that such a thing as a bow-wave report exists, his error is all the more certain.

The bow-wave report and the muzzle blast may reach Mr. Bystander's ears at the same instant. In this case, busy hearing the first, he doesn't hear the second at all; or, if he hears them both, he is decidedly confused, probably deciding in favor of the bow-wave. All of this goes to show that the typical bystander is incapable of accurately locating the gun fired by the sounds he hears. We have considered a case in the open, and if the same experiment were conducted in a city street the confusion of echoes would make the error even greater.

Therefore we may say that a man bent on committing murder with a silenced rifle has gone to a lot of illegal trouble for comparatively nothing. Now let's see about the use of silencers on other types of firearms.

THE ordinary revolver is almost as noisy with a silencer attached as without one. The cylinder of a revolver must revolve freely. Because it must function even after the bearing has become covered with sticky deposit, the cylinder is fitted rather loosely into the frame. Hold a revolver to the light and you can easily see a gap which the bullet must jump. This is a point of leakage. A silencer will blot up the noise coming out of a revolver muzzle, but the discharge noise also escapes between the cylinder and the frame. The inventor Maxim publicly demonstrated this fact many times, but the erroneous notion still persists that a revolver can be silenced. It cannot.

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Automatics present other troubles to one who seeks to hush up his shooting. In one type of automatic, the ejecting and reloading mechanism is actuated by the recoil of the barrel. Colt automatics are of this type, except the .22 Woodsman. A silencer added to one of these guns upsets the automatic action. The heavier mass does not recoil with sufficient vigor, and the result is a jam. One shot, or, with luck, several shots may be fired from a silenced automatic of this type, but an attempt at rapid shooting promptly meets with failure. This effectively eliminates from the field of silence crookdom's favorite weapon, the Colt Government Model .45 automatic.

Another type of automatic depends for its action on the blow-back principle, as, for example, the Savage. This kind of gun is also sure to jam if a silencer is attached. The gases imprisoned by the silencer blow back through the breech when it opens, making a noise, and depositing unburned grains of powder in the breech mechanism.

The deposit quickly causes a jam. This type of weapon must, therefore, also be eliminated so far as the use of a silencer is concerned.

In addition to this, the muzzle construction of some automatics is such that there is simply no way of attaching a silencer to them even if it would work!

What sidearms are there, then, on which a silencer will function effectively The answer is, very few. Specifically, considering every limitation noted above, the silencer is effective with a .22 calibre single-shot target pistol, which acts precisely like a small rifle; the .22 Colt Woodsman, which is an automatic; the smallest calibers Webley, Lüger and Mauser automatics. These are powerful weapons, but certainly not the favorite weapons of gangdom, especially when the addition of a silencer makes them longer and awkward to handle.

There, briefly, is pertinent information for you on silencers. At this point, I hope that the detective story writers among my readers are blushing for their past sins. (Confidentially, I am one of the same clan, masking under a pseudonym, filled with an evangelical fire to do them a brotherly service so that they may go and sin no more against the vast numbers of gun enthusiasts who know better.) The inevitable conclusion is that technical limitations have outlawed the silencer for side-arms even more effectively than the statutes. Silence is golden, no doubt even to the gunman, but it's very hard to get.

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Thief

By Cole Richards

"These are not even good counterfeits!"

D F W
Off-the-Trail
SHORT

Pearls Were Scorned by the Thief Who Risked Death for a Petty Bit of Silver

PULSE tingling, Cruz Acuna slid into the bull-ring seat, with a sidelong glance at the lean, steel-eyed American next to him. Acuna's serene manner masked his tingling of triumph. Since arriving at the Guadalupe bull ring, he had been trying to reach the American's side. The sunny section was in shade and the matadors were playing the last bull before a tall, skinny Mexican in gray vacated the seat.

It was the crowning triumph of a successful afternoon. A pearl necklace, a hundred *pesos* in paper and three watches traced Acuna's progress through the grandstand. The loot lay snug in his white linens, without a betraying bulge. His linens were as trim as his lithe body, his aquiline nose, and his clean-shaven brown cheeks.

Acuna lit a corn husk cigarette. He let the smoke trail toward the American. The Yankee's narrow nostrils quivered and he licked his lips. Without taking his eyes from the matador, he brought out his cigarette case.

Acuna's heart pounded. It was exactly as he had thought when he

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glimpsed it in the crowd at the ticket window. The cigarette case was no cheap, shiny imitation silver. In the dull gleam of rich old metal there was dignity, reserve, the mark of a gentleman. Cruz Acuna's mouth watered. His delicate fingers flexed. He could feel the smooth square of silver, with its rounded edges, as plainly as if it were already in his hand.

The American restored the case to his inside coat pocket, a damnable place to reach.

Acuna pulled his Panama lower over somber eyes.

In the ring, the matador played the red cape, vainly trying to get the bull into position. The crowd howled obscenities. The American chuckled. Someone tapped Acuna on the shoulder. Liquor-laden breath assailed him.

"With your permission, señor, this is my seat."

Acuna raised somber eyes to the tall, skinny Mexican in gray. "With your permission, señor, I stay. Since the first bull was announced, I have been here," he lied, serenely.

"Eh, *bien*, perhaps. I thought . . ." The skinny man fumbled drunkenly in a wallet for his seat check.

Cruz Acuna's experienced eyes took in every detail of the wallet. He saw a card, carrying the skinny man's picture, the seal of Mexico, and various important, all too familiar words. An agent of the police!

A pearl necklace, three watches and a hundred *pesos* burned the thief's pockets. He mumbled an apology, pushed through the howling mob and took up his position by the exit.

His glance traveled under his hat-brim, across the passion tossed crowd to the agent and the American. They were talking together like long-lost companions, though not a word had passed between them previously. The agent had begun the conversation.

Cruz Acuna sought in his mind for a picture. While his hands were otherwise engaged, his eyes always grasped every detail of a scene. The reel of pictures ran off now: loaded passenger busses bumping across the river, the excited crowd spilling out at the bull ring, the swarm of ticket buyers. In each picture, Acuna saw the skinny agent sticking to the American like a burr. He saw, too, a one-eyed *mestizo* who kept the gringo in sight.

The one-eyed man now sat behind the agent, all ears for the conversation. His silver-trimmed *sombrero* was pushed back. Hunched forward on one elbow, he had hitched up his coat until it betrayed the stiletto in his red sash.

"That *cabron* of a Lopez!" Acuna scowled.

The one-eyed Lopez was a *bravo*, a bodyguard and killer, for one Lobo Martinez. In Monterey, Martinez specialized in "antique" jewelry for the tourist trade. His store connected with a house where admittance was gained by three long taps and a short. In that house, Martinez was a fence. Every thief on the border knew Martinez, the jewel fence, and his *bravo* Lopez.

Mutual contempt, based on personal pride of profession, stood between Acuna and Lopez. The thief scorned a mere bodyguard. The *bravo* despised anyone who did not live by the knife and gun. And there were skeletons to be rattled. Acuna knew that Lopez paid to have his hard killings done. Lopez knew Acuna lacked jewel sense; he was forever bringing paste necklaces to Lobo Martinez.

Scowling, the thief watched the one-eyed *bravo's* eavesdropping. Curiosity

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stung Cruz Acuna until his delicate fingers twitched.

"Who," he asked himself, "is this Yankee in whom the police agent and Lopez take such an interest?"

IN the ring, a stubborn bull suddenly charged. The sword ran home. The entertainment was over. A cheering crowd swirled round the exits. Acuna was mauled and stepped on. A flood of excited Mexicans carried him far from the American, and finally thrust him through the exit.

An American woman passed close by him. Acuna stared at her blankly, because her pearl necklace lay in his trouser pocket.

Her hand lightly touched her throat. "My pearls are gone," she said, in mild annoyance.

"Too bad. Expensive?" her companion asked.

She smiled. "A dollar in San Antone."

Acuna sighed inwardly.

He waited outside fifteen minutes. The crowd thinned and melted away. Acuna re-entered the grandstand. It was empty. The American, the agent and the one-eyed *bravo* had eluded him.

He strolled past the feed lot where the bull ring nags grazed, and past the church into the plaza, where fiesta booths made a colorful, noisy circle.

The patron saint of thieves was with Cruz Acuna. The American stood alone at a booth, eating chicken and tortillas. He looked on the tortilla with disfavor, and took the first bite gingerly. Not used to Mexican food, Acuna thought; newly over the border.

Acuna ordered enchiladas, savory with cheese and chili sauce. He ate placidly for a minute. The American glanced at him, favorably. Acuna's white linens and his clean-cut face made a good impression.

"It was the great bullfight, no, señor?"

"Okay," the American agreed. His steel-gray eyes and lean face gave promise of cool daring, but he needed the crucible of experience. He was too young for his years; that meant, too young for any business which interested a police agent and Lopez. "I'd have enjoyed the fight more," he went on, in eager Spanish, "if I hadn't been delayed on a deal. Business first and then pleasure, is my motto. My customer put me off from this morning until tonight."

"One learns patience in Mexico," Cruz pronounced, serenely. "The Mexican knows how to wait." He licked the chili sauce from his fingers and wiped them dry on newspaper. He ordered a small dish of beans. "You are new to my country, Señor—"

"Hall," the American supplied. "Yes. First trip. Made a nice deal in New Orleans, and thought I could turn a penny here. That is," he finished, lamely, "if I see anything good." He thought he had said too much, and his lips tightened.

Cruz Acuna waited. He knew when not to question.

Hall broke the silence. "Know anyone in Guadalupe named Garcia?"

"I know a thousand Garcias, and most of them live in Guadalupe. It is a name as common as Smith in your country, señor."

The steel-gray eyes narrowed. "Are you hinting that 'Garcia' is an assumed name?"

Acuna regarded him gravely. "I do not know your Garcia, señor, nor your business with him," he said, softly.

"Of course not," Hall rebuked him-

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self. "Getting jittery," he muttered in English. After a moment, he asked, "Are there a thousand Meson Hidalgos here, too?"

"No," Acuna wondered whether the American noticed his catch of breath. "There is only one."

A shoulder bumped him, and a sharp elbow stabbed his ribs. Lopez took his stand between the two men. The silver-trimmed *sombrero* was tilted to the left. His good eye was on Acuna's side. The black bead was alert for attack. Alert? Hopeful! Contempt flicked from it like a whiplash. The *bravo's* fingernails tapped on the knife hilt in his sash.

"Señor," he addressed Hall without looking at him, "you do not know this fellow, eh He is friendly, no? He gets close to you, no? *Si,* without doubt. Do you wish to know what he is?" His soft drawl gained a contemptuous lilt. "He is a thief."

THE American surveyed Lopez from head to foot, and then inspected Cruz Acuna. Hall felt the deadliness in the atmosphere, and saw the *bravo's* hand lusting for the knife, but he did not believe his senses or his sight.

"No fooling? Are you a thief?"

Cruz Acuna knew his Yankees. A noisy denial and great show of distress at unjust accusations, makes some of them trustful; some, Hall included, fall for frankness.

"One does not scorn what God puts into one's hands, señor," Cruz answered, serenely. "He gives plentifully because we are close to His heart. Did He not choose two thieves, out of all mankind, to share the crucifixion?"

"Uh!" the American gasped, for he was new to Mexico and had not heard this version of the Drama.

A slow grin made fine crinkles beside the steely eyes; it spread to his mouth. It was friendly. Hall edged away from the one-eyed *bravo.* "Thank you for your interest, *amigo.* I have nothing to lose."

Lopez' teeth gleamed between thin-drawn lips. "You know, better than I, what you have, *gringo.*"

Lopez glared at Acuna. Acuna smiled his contempt, and kept his hands on the booth. Lopez slipped away, as noiselessly as he had come.

Hall moved his dish of beans, instead of resuming his position close to the thief.

Cruz fished out a cornhusk cigarette, ran it along his tongue, and sealed it with slim, deft fingers. "*Bien,* señor, I hope you have success in your deal with Garcia. Meson Hidalgo is beyond the *Plaza de Toros.* Shall I," he asked, politely, "take you there?"

"No, thanks. I'll find it," Hall said, dryly. The steely eyes were quizzical. "*Adios*—thief."

"*Hasta luego.* Perhaps we shall meet again." Acuna smiled serenely, and bowed himself away.

Night wrapped Guadalupe in velvet. Red, white and green lights twinkled in strings over the plaza. Merrymakers eddied through the fiesta booths. Gay chatter and amorous laughter floated up from the plaza to dark side streets. A girl's caressing voice and two strumming guitars blended in pulse-quickening refrain, "Ai, ai, ai! Ai, ai, ai!" Fiesta called with myriad voices. Cruz Acuna heard none of them.

He stalked past the church toward the bull ring. The serene smile no longer screened his smoldering anger. The day had been bad, very bad, what with the paste pearls and two chances to get a cigarette case, ruined. He could have been patient about losing

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the seat to the police agent, but Lopez —*Cabron,* he-goat, the worst name he could be called, was too mild. The *bravo* had expected to be knifed for it.

"He will be knifed, too, when the time suits me better," Acuna promised.

He was by the feed lot, then, where the bull ring nags grazed. Suddenly he halted short. His muscles were tensed for flight or for battle. His hand flew to his stiletto. His breath stopped.

The soft velvet night had given forth sounds which had nothing to do with fiesta. They came from behind the high board fence, a surprised grunt, a shuffling, and a thud. Acuna *saw* the sounds: a man stabbed, half turning, then falling on his knees. The final bubbling groan was short.

Acuna slipped behind a cypress. He pressed close to the thick trunk, praying that the fiesta lights might not reflect from his light clothes.

A man stole, shadow-like, from the grazing lot. Outside the fence, he paused to light a cigarette. The wax match burned high before the hawk nose and single eye of Lopez. The *bravo* strolled on, to the plaza, and melted into the crowd.

Acuna swiftly crossed to the feed lot. Inside the fence, he struck a match. The flame was a tiny yellow flower against the velvet night.

At his feet was a blood-spattered *serape,* old and ragged, used by the killer to protect his clothes. Beyond it, sprawled the skinny police agent, face down. His life lay like a crimson scarf across his shoulders.

WHILE the match burned, Acuna studied the scene. He was not glad; he bore no ill-will toward the agent. He was not shocked; death is part of life. He noted, coolly, that the agent was thoroughly dead and that the knife had been withdrawn. The *serape* was probably stolen from some beggar, deep in the sleep of tequila. There was nothing to show that the agent had been knifed by a jewel buyer's *bravo.*

"Thus the *gringo* has lost the only protection he had," Acuna thought, as he stole from the feed lot. "He goes all alone to the Meson Hidalgo, carrying what he bought in New Orleans to be sold over the border. Eh, it is too bad." He clucked his tongue sympathetically. The American was a pleasant fellow, who would be cool and daring if he lived long enough.

The Meson Hidalgo was a three-story adobe, built around a courtyard. Two floors were sleeping rooms; the lower floor, a stable. The Meson's reputation smelled like a six-day unburied carcass. Border riffraff stopped there overnight, slept with one eye open and, at that, sometimes failed to see the dawn.

A weak electric light indicated the wide entrance to the courtyard, without disturbing the shadows. Acuna hugged the dark as he slipped in, because white linens were seldom seen in the Meson. The fiesta noises were faint here. Somewhere upstairs, a woman sang in quick time, her whisky-soaked soprano shrill, provocative. Stable odors, mingled with strong, cheap perfumes, and miserable human bodies, made Acuna's nostrils wrinkle. He moved on silent feet. His hand lay lightly on his knife.

A small dung fire burned at the far end of the courtyard. Half a dozen men were hunched around it, shutting off the light. Wrapped in *serapes,* faces almost hidden by mountainous *sombreroes,* their general outline was buzzard-like. The dung fire light sketched dirty toes in sandal thongs, sensuous mouths, and somber, crafty eyes. They

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were *leperos,* scum of the gutters, beggars at best, unspeakably dirty.

Acuna cautiously approached through the shadows until he was close enough to hear their conversation. They had seen him enter the courtyard, but when he did not go to the stair, they forgot him. For half an hour, they mumbled of politics and market gossip. Now and again, one gestured with a filth-encrusted claw.

"That girl," one was saying, "who sells cheese—"

"Ssst!"

Clacking tongues silenced. Each man hunched forward, until the *sombrero* rims touched. Heads turned slyly. Crafty eyes shifted toward the entrance. In the silence of the *serape*-wrapped figures, the faint hissing of the dung fire was loud, loud.

The American strode briskly through the entrance. He paused, looked to left and right, and made for the stair. A light hung there, in an old carriage lantern. Though it was dim, it hung low enough to show the cut of the clothes and the lean features. Hall ran lightly up the stair. Six pairs of rapacious eyes followed him. He paused again at the top, and then ducked into the building.

Lepero breaths released in a wind that dipped the fire.

"He is that one?" asked a ragged man, with scaly hands.

"He is that one." The confirming whisper came from a tall fellow with fiery eyes.

"We will let him get away," the ragged one whined.

"He will leave the way he came. Be patient," the fiery-eyed man counseled. "He has no money now. He will have it when he comes out. And we get it in addition to the *peso* which Lopez promised.'

The ragged one squirmed. Another sharpened his knife on the thick sole of his sandal. The fiery-eyed man whistled a lilting tune between set teeth.

"What is he selling?" the ragged one suddenly inquired. His voice throbbed with pride at his good reasoning. "Who will get what he comes to sell?"

"Ssst!"

ANOTHER man had entered the courtyard, and was mounting the stair. Light reflected from the silver on his hat, and gave his red sash the tinge of blood.

The six around the fire watched him in awe and jealous hatred, poorly hidden. Each of them was staring at the dung fire, and thinking of Lopez' silver-trimmed *sombrero,* when Acuna went up the stair. The ragged one who had asked, "What is he selling?" did not repeat the question.

Acuna entered a short, narrow hallway. At the end of the hall, Lopez was going into a room overlooking the street. The door shut quietly; the bolt clicked. Acuna ran the length of the hall. He put his ear to the door.

The American was talking. "So you're Garcia! I didn't know how to recognize the man Martinez would send. Why didn't you tell me you were Garcia, at the fiesta?"

"I had only one chance," Lopez protested, with ingratiating inflection. "And then you were companion to a thief. He is smart, for a thief. He can take your socks, señor, without removing the shoes."

"Gosh! Well, let's get down to business."

Acuna slipped through the window to a small iron balcony. There was no street light, and the hall light cut but

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a thin strip in the dark. The balcony outside the room where Lopez dealt, was equally well shadowed. By dint of a long stretch, Acuna made the crossing. He hugged the wall, and peeked in.

His heart thumped hard, just once, against his ribs. Lopez stood beside the big window, with his back to Acuna. The thief could touch the red sash and the pocket of the black coat. Acuna did touch them, with a lip curl of contempt for the *bravo*.

"Let's get through here," the American was saying, uneasily. "I don't like this *meson*."

"You will never see a safer place in Mexico," said Lopez, almost too softly.

The *bravo's* hand was on his hip. Acuna peered through the crook of the arm, and saw Hall unfasten his shirt. The American opened a chamois belt next the skin, and took out a long, flat package. It was limp, and he handled it carefully.

"Martinez put these on." Hall indicated red wax seals generously decorating the package. "He examined the stones in Laredo, and liked them, but he didn't have the money with him then."

"I know. He explained. I am to take the package and pay you. I am only a bodyguard," Lopez shrugged and smiled. "I have no more jewel sense than has Cruz Acuna."

Hall held out the package, but Lopez did not leave the window. Hall had to go to him, hand over the package, and receive the money. It was in bills. Hall went to the table. He counted the sum.

"Good," he commented. "Exact amount. Maybe we can make another deal—" The statement ended in a question. Hall bent over a bill in the middle of the package. He held it up to the dim light. "Bum one," he said.

"Oh, that is too bad!" Lopez pretended surprise. "Luckily, it is only five *pesos*. That I can replace. The others are all right, I am sure. We had better hurry," he added, hastily. "The hour grows late. Shall I help you put the money in the belt?"

"No," Hall said, bruskly. His steely eyes were cold. "There is more than one bad note, Lopez. I have found five. These are not even good counterfeits."

"You do not accuse me?" Lopez asked. His finger tips made music on his knife belt. He approached Hall, lithe and soft-footed as a cougar. "Let us go to Monterey. We will get you good money."

"Sorry. The deal's off. Give me my diamonds."

"No," Lopez drawled. The lilt and ingratiating inflection were still in his voice. "That is not good business. We will go together." He circled Hall. "Permit me, my friend, to open the door for you."

Hall had slowly pivoted, to keep face to face with the *bravo*. "Don't open the door."

OUTSIDE the window, Acuna sucked in his breath. Although he could not detect flaws in pearls, he could detect them in men's voices. The American had spoken bruskly, but there was a faint quaver in his voice, a flaw in the iron. Acuna thought, "He is unarmed. He carries diamonds, and comes to such a *meson*, with only his two hands." The picture of the slain agent flitted across his mind.

"You don't want me to open the door?" Lopez salted his drawl with a sneer.

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"No." Hall tapped the table. "Put the diamonds here, Garcia, or whatever your name is."

The *bravo's* beady eyes traveled over the American. Lopez lifted his chin and one shoulder, as if he had been freed of a weight. He had had long experience in hand-to-hand battle. He knew by the way the American stood, that he was unarmed.

Lopez swaggered as he returned to the table. It was between him and the American.

"And if I do open the door?" he asked. "What do you think would happen? You would jump me, no? Do you know who would come when the scuffle was heard? Or you might shout for help. What help would you get in a *meson* filled with *gringo*-haters?"

"So it's that sort of place," Hall muttered.

"Ye-es," the *bravo* lilted. "If you were to die here, your body would be put in a cart, under straw, and it would be found floating in the river, miles away."

Their eyes clashed.

The American suddenly smiled. "Terrifying," he said, casually.

"Isn't it?" Lopez agreed. He, too, smiled. He was watching Hall's hands and eyes. The *bravo's* shoulder lifted slightly, with the tightening of his arm muscle. "That is what would happen if you tried to keep me from opening the door. I tell you this because I don't want you to think I fear you."

"Mm," Hall said, noncommittally.

"Here are your diamonds." Lopez slapped the package down with his left hand.

The package was in the middle of the table. The table was wide. Hall had to stretch his arm and lean far out to grasp the package.

Light glinted at the *bravo's* sash. The stiletto had leaped into the swarthy hand. A flashing crescent marked the upsweep of the steel. The *bravo's* grip was strong and sure.

The blade would follow his eye to the back of Hall's neck.

The blow descended, part way, never to go farther. There was a thud. The *bravo's* arm struck sidewise, convulsively. His limp fingers released the stiletto. Then Lopez was standing there, watching the blood race down his sleeve, while he plucked foolishly at the knife in his arm.

Cruz Acuna was good with the stiletto, too.

Hall straightened up, clutching his precious package. His glance flicked from Lopez to Acuna, entering the window.

Lopez suddenly set his teeth, and jerked the knife free. He made a left hand throw. Acuna sidestepped. The blade thumped into the wall.

Instantly Lopez made a dive for his own knife. Hall was quicker; his foot slammed down on the blade. Lopez gave him a wild glare. He wrenched the door open. Not a sound broke from his lips. Down the hall he raced, and down the stair.

A SPOT of blood shone bright beside the door. In the crimson spot, gleamed something round and white. More crimson drops traced Lopez' path down the hall, and more pearls rolled on the *meson* floor, plinked on the stair and rattled on the courtyard cobblestones. They came from the hole cut by Cruz Acuna in the *bravo's* pocket, at the window.

"Is that a pearl?" Hall asked.

"Paste," Acuna answered, with an expert's certainty. "Put the diamonds in your belt, señor, quickly. We must go down the stair. The *meson* has no

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other exit." While he talked, he recovered his stiletto from the wall and wiped it on his handkerchief.

Hall was buttoning his shirt. "But the *gringo*-haters?"

"*Leperos,* who will kill any one for any price. Lopez paid them a *peso* each. It happens, I paused by their fire and told them Lopez carries valuable pearls, and that each pearl is worth a peso at the house of Lobo Martinez. *Si,* the word of a man in white linens carries weight with *leperos.* Come. Hurry, while the buzzards are busy."

The two men paused briefly on the stair, when the scene below froze Hall in his tracks. The buzzards had swooped on the *bravo* in a body. They were shoulder to shoulder around him, and their *serapes* hid his death, like a tent.

Unseen, unheard, the knives worked, buying the pearls which had cost a dollar in San Antonio.

"The next best thing to knowing pearls," Cruz Acuna whispered, "is knowing what to do with them."

The Yankee and the thief strolled away from the *meson,* though their thundering pulses urged them to run. Arm in arm, like fiesta companions, they came to the plaza. The red, white and green lights twinkled peacefully. Chattering crowds surged around gambling booths. Guitars strummed and a girl sang in caressing voice, the haunting refrain, "Ai, ai, ai! Ai, ai, ai!"

A bus was waiting. Cruz gripped Hall's arm and half lifted him up the step.

"You got me out of a tight place," Hall said. "Can I offer you pay?"

He feared Acuna would be insulted. The thief responded nobly.

"No, I do not want pay! I did it for you because you are my friend."

"But you risked your life."

"It was nothing." Acuna backed away from the *camion.*

Fleeting suspicion blackened Hall's heart. He touched his waist to make sure that the belt of diamonds still reposed there. It did. The bus door slammed. The *camion* rolled away, bearing a *gringo* with a strange wonder in his steely eyes.

Back to a fiesta booth went Cruz Acuna, for he was hungry. "The chicken, señora, and tortillas, and coffee."

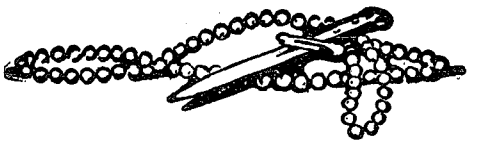
"'You had a good day, señor?" the booth keeper asked.

A good day? A hundred *pesos* in paper, three watches, and the goat of a Lopez disposed of forever.

"All that comes from God is good," he answered serenely.

When he had finished eating, he opened a package of cornhusk cigarettes. Then, and not till then, did he permit himself the luxury of touching what lay in the hidden pocket of his sleeve.

Blissfully, reverently, he placed the cornhusk fags within the rich, dignified silver of the *gringo's* cigarette case.



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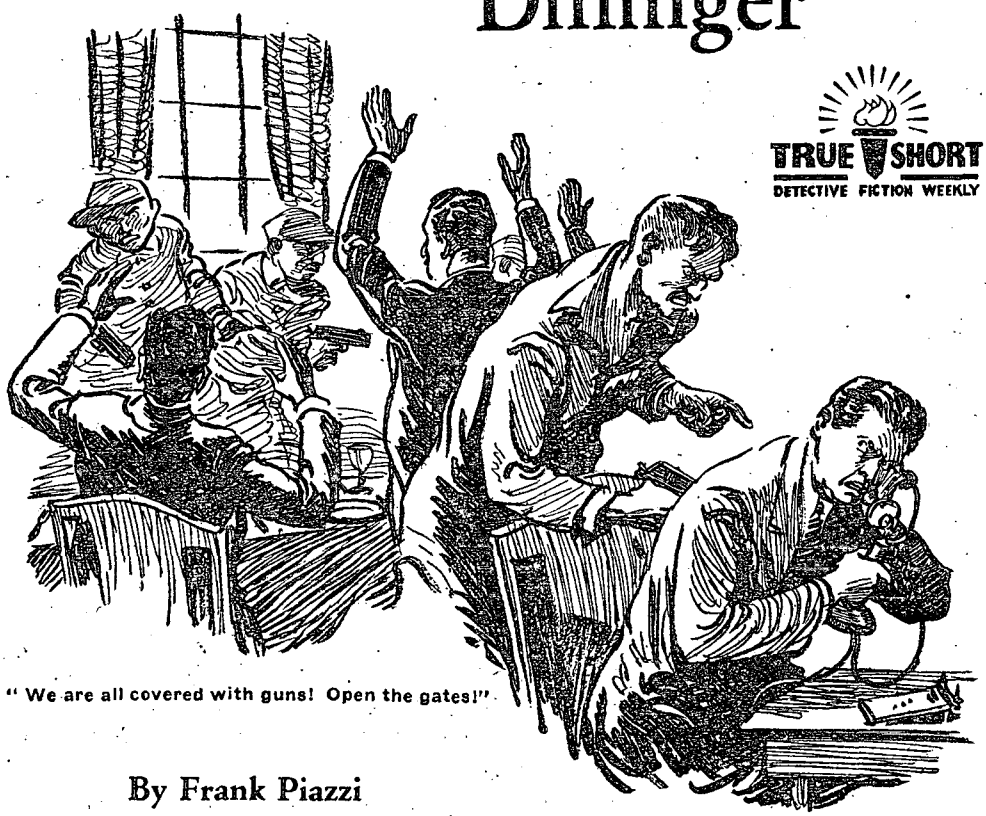
He Wanted to Out-Do Dillinger

TRUE SHORT
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



"We are all covered with guns! Open the gates!"

By Frank Piazzi

"IN the matter of the parole application of Clyde Stevens, Alameda County robber: we have no choice but to grant him a parole. He is well behaved. His prison record is perfect, and he is a first offender . . ."

The voice of Mark Noon, secretary of the California parole board, droned on in the administration building in San Quentin prison. It was late afternoon in October of 1934. Around the conference table were seated the members of the parole board: Chairman Frank C. Sykes, friend of the governor; Joseph H. Stephens, Sacramento banker; Warren Atherton, Stockton attorney and American Legionnaire, all prominent men.

What Held Guards Powerless in Prison Watchtowers While Desperate Criminals Raced Frantically to Freedom?

Chairman Sykes glanced at the others and nodded.

"So ordered—effective October 31. Next business."

Noon's voice droned on. To him

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this was routine. He had been doing it for twenty years. There were six thousand men in San Quentin, a penitentiary originally built to house three thousand convicts. Parole applications were numerous. This paroling of a model prisoner, a "good boy," might spur other convicts to good behavior. At the same time it would help reduce the dangerous congestion in the prison that brooded sullenly at the foggy fringe of San Francisco Bay.

But news traveled fast in San Quentin. The prison "grapevine" had a thousand eyes and ears. A trusty clerk in the administration building whispered to a trusty janitor, who tipped off a trusty gardener, working outside in the "reservation." In a few brief minutes the whole prison knew. The information raced through the reservation, past barred gates, into the "yard." Even the "fish" in the sardine cells of condemned row knew.

It reached Stevens in the carpenter shop. The twenty-three year old bandit grinned. But there was no humor in his flinty eyes, no joy in his chill, set face.

"Three years in this living hell for a chain store stick-up!" he snarled, thin lips twisting. "I'll make 'em pay for that—damn 'em!"

"Easy, Clyde!" came the warning hiss of Rudolph B. Straight, his companion. He was serving fifteen years for robbery. "This is the break we've waited for. Don't blow your topper now you're paroled. You're our only hope of getting out of here. Remember there are four of us counting on you."

"Okay," Stevens nodded. He bent to his work, his savage telltale face hidden from the inquisitive glance of a passing guard. "I'll fix that bunch! Wait till I get out! I'm not forgetting you fellows. Tell Joe, and Fred, and Alex we're going through with my plan. I'll have guns in here for you in a week. I've got big plans for us when we all get outside. We're going places!"

Straight moved off about his work. It wouldn't do now to arouse suspicion. Not now—with Stevens paroled!

Back in the administration building Mark Noon's voice droned on interminably, unaware of what fate had in store for him and those with him.

"In the matter of the parole application of Dominick Parella . . ."

STEVENS landed in San Francisco via the Golden Gate ferry with the grim determination to make society pay for his imprisonment. Forgotten were his glib promises to Warden James B. Holohan back in San Quentin. Forgotten were his three miserable years in stir; the crowded cells; the rough prison garb; the deadly routine; the unpredictable hates and feuds of the Big House, that flared so suddenly into murderous unexpected knifings.

Remembered only was his dream of a gang of daring followers: his promise to get Straight and his three confederates out of prison. With those men in his mob he could do things in a big way. He yearned to eclipse Dillinger!

First, he contacted Albert Kessel, paroled three days previously from San Quentin. They met in an obscure hotel room. To reach the rendezvous, Stevens threaded a bewildering trail through San Francisco's underworld: the Embarcadero, Chinatown, the Barbary Coast, and finally to the cheap hotel South o' the Slot. He didn't intend to have any stoolie or plainclothes dick tail him.

After the first moments of joyful

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reunion Stevens plunged into the important business.

"What about guns?" he demanded. "We'll need a lot of heaters. For us and for the mob up the bay."

"I've already got 'em spotted," Kessel assured him. "A Third Street pawnshop. Blumenthal's. He's got six automatics—forty-fives."

"That's the stuff!" Stevens rubbed his hands. He paced the room feverishly, eyes ablaze. "Get 'em quick. I know two punks I can send over for the guns. No use us being spotted. Not while we can get dumb bunnies to do it for us!"

Within forty-eight hours after his parole, Clyde Stevens had six automatics within his possession!

Two he kept for himself and Kessel. The four others he smuggled into San Quentin prison, in a manner that fully revealed the most ingenious cunning of Stevens' criminal brain.

The day after his release from prison, Stevens and Kessel met Dominick Parella, just paroled, as he arrived at the Ferry Building from Sausalito. With this as a nucleus of his future gang, Stevens took the guns to San Rafael and then to the neighboring village of San Anselmo.

In a public garage there, Stevens knew, Harry Simpson, a civilian truck driver employed at San Quentin prison, parked his automobile at night. Stevens hid the four guns under the floorboards of Simpson's car. Through a friend of one of his henchmen, he got word into the prison to his confederates: Straight, Alexander McKay, Joe Kristy, and Fred Landers.

Four more desperate men could not be found. All were in for long terms, but determined to escape. Straight, thirty-five years old, had been sent up from Alameda County to serve a six to fifteen year stretch for robbery. In 1933 he tried to escape by sawing a bar from his cell window. He was discovered and sent to the dungeons for two weeks. Again in 1934, he tried to escape, but was caught. In his possession guards found a master key to all the cells on his tier, a hook, a steel rod, and thirty feet of rope! After that he was never permitted outside the walls of the prison, being confined to the main yard.

With him in the plot were Alexander McKay, twenty-eight, a Los Angeles robber, serving thirteen and one-half years. Although rated a hard prisoner, because of his stabbing of another convict on September 11, 1933, McKay was allowed outside the yard and worked as a gardener in the "reservation." The other two were Joe Kristy, twenty-six, Los Angeles kidnaper, a two-time loser, serving a fifteen year sentence; and Fred Landers, twenty-seven, a San Francisco cab driver, doing twelve years for robbery and five for assault with a deadly weapon. Both worked outside the walls in the reservation.

These last three, because of their greater freedom, were detailed by Straight to watch for Simpson's car. Simpson was in the habit of parking his machine inside the prison entrance on the reservation. It was a simple matter for the trio, when Simpson came to work at the prison, to transfer the weapons to a small two-wheeled handcart used by the convicts in their gardening work. The weapons were hidden under the floorboards of the handcart. They still had to smuggle the guns into the main prison where Straight was confined.

Biding their time, they accomplished this by hiding the guns in a keg of nails. During the regular course of

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work, the keg was hauled directly into the prison carpenter shop. There McKay removed the guns and hid them under the floor of the shop, easily available to the four plotters.

Within a week after his parole Stevens had supplied guns to his confederates in the state penitentiary, despite the vigilance of countless prison guards!

MEANWHILE, in San Francisco, Stevens embarked on a new career of crime which in the short space of a few weeks definitely established him as Public Enemy No. 1. Less than ten days after his parole he looted the American Trust Company branch bank at Haight and Fillmore Streets.

On December 17, 1934, he walked into the Hotel Whitcomb branch of the same bank and looted it, calmly disarming Police Lieutenant Robert Williams, who was in the bank! Stevens brazenly added the policeman's gun to his own armament.

So busy was he now planning and executing bank robberies that he forgot about his friends in prison.

But San Francisco police also were on the job. Spurred by the audacious raid on the bank in the Hotel Whitcomb, they placed two men in plainclothes in every San Francisco branch bank in an effort to trap Stevens and his gang.

On January 11, 1935, Stevens walked into the trap—and out again with six hundred and fifty dollars!

It was at the American Trust Company branch bank at Polk and California Streets. Corporal Frank Cavanaugh and Policeman Oakley Burns were on guard in the bank. During the afternoon Stevens and two of his mobsters entered.

Stevens and Kessel confronted Cashier Jerome T. Murray.

"We want money and lots of it! Hurry it up!" Stevens snarled. Murray glimpsed the guns and shoved thirty dollars through the wicket. Frantically he tried to signal Cavanaugh and Burns.

Cursing Murray's small contribution, the bandits moved along to the cages of John Angin and Gus Nelson. These two boosted the robbers' loot to six hundred and fifty dollars. The third bandit, meanwhile, spotted the two policemen and drew his gun.

"Get back, you fools, or I'll shoot!"

The command threw the bank into an uproar. Clerks and clients began screaming and shouting, milling about madly. The bandit fired: once, twice—wham! wham! Both shots missed. Burns, fearful of hitting a bystander, fired twice, but missed.

Stevens signalled retreat. Firing over the heads of the terrified bank patrons, they backed out the door. Still firing, they raced to their getaway car. In a moment they were gone.

Burns and Cavanaugh poured a hail of lead after the fleeing car. It was found later, abandoned in a remote suburb. The rear of the machine, stolen that morning from W. J. Bush, was riddled with bullets.

As a result of this daring raid, a $1,000 reward for the capture of Stevens—dead or alive—was offered by the police.

This new turn of events, coupled with the narrowness of his escape, made Stevens pause. He had something to think about. The robbery took in only six hundred and fifty dollars. Not enough for the risks he had run. From the newspapers he learned that there was considerably more money in the bank. Failure of his two confed-

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erates to control the crowd, and the presence of the two policemen, had stampeded his carefully planned hold-up, frustrating a big haul.

What he needed, he decided, was a big mob like Dillinger's. Enough men to handle a big stick-up without any slip-ups, half a dozen or more, so that he could cover all exits, man the get-away car, keep a look-out, and hold everything under control. There would be no bungling and he could collect every dollar in the bank.

His mind reverted to his plan for freeing the four convicts in San Quentin. He had smuggled guns in to them. Now he must get his confederates out. He tackled that problem.

McKAY, Kristy, and Landers were "inside trusties," convicts permitted to do work outside of the main walls of the prison, but inside the reservation fence. But Straight, the bad one, the leader, was confined strictly within the main walls of the prison. Yet he had to lead the break. How to get him out into the reservation?

The result of Stevens' planning was transmitted to the imprisoned men by a friend of Kessel's.

On the night of January 15, 1935, after lock-up when the prison was in darkness, Straight and McKay changed their prison uniforms. Now Straight wore the identifying number for McKay, and McKay had Straight's number.

When work started next morning, Straight walked calmly through the main prison gate and passed out into the reservation. Guards who checked out the trusties at the main gate, recognizing his number, passed him as McKay. Kristy and Landers were waiting for him in the reservation.

McKay, with Straight's number on his uniform, was still within the prison walls. Waiting until mid-morning, when the guards at the gate were busy checking trusties in and out, McKay boldly sauntered through the gate on his own recognizance! The guards knew him as a regular trusty who passed freely and nodded to him. They did not check his number.

All four convicts were now outside the prison walls, with only the reservation fence and the guard towers barring their way to freedom. All were armed. All were ready for the desperate break planned by Stevens.

Working around their gravel truck, repairing a road near Warden Holohan's mansion, they were alert to everything. Their eyes glinted as they saw the warden's big limousine parked nearby. Down in the administration building, they knew, the parole board was in session.

The zero hour was near.

With a preliminary buzz the clock in the parole board room struck the hour: high noon. The secretary, Mark Noon, looked up from the paper he was reading.

"Warden Holohan expects us for lunch."

"Let's go," Atherton said. "Move we adjourn until two."

"Second," said Stephens, and the directors stood up. Walking out of the administration building, Atherton, Stephens, Sykes, and Noon, discussed the peaceful scene presented by the big reservation. Groups of trusties worked everywhere in the gardens and flower beds. Others sawed and hammered, repairing buildings. Some carried materials. Near the path leading uphill to the warden's mansion the parole board passed four gray clad convicts operating a small gravel truck.

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"Everybody busy," one of the parole board members said. "You know, this outdoor work, close to the soil and in the sunshine, is good for these men. Too bad we can't let them all out here."

They passed on up the walk, past the flowered terraces that landscaped the knoll crowned by the warden's mansion. It was a big white Colonial house, reminiscent of a plantation home.

Behind them one of the convicts climbed off the gravel truck and drove a stick into the ground.

"When the shadow reaches here,"—he marked off a spot on the ground—"we move in on 'em."

Surreptitiously his three confederates nudged their concealed weapons.

ONE o'clock. In the dining room of the warden's mansion the guests were dallying over cigars and coffee. Mrs. Holohan had retired to a distant wing of the big house, while in another wing, working on some papers, was Charles C. Coxe, newly appointed state parole officer.

In the main hallway the phone rang. Warden Holohan excused himself to answer it.

At that moment the gravel truck drove up to the rear door. The four gray-clad convicts on it were in full view of the guards in the rifle and machine gun towers. Although outside the main inner wall of the prison, the convicts were unguarded, as they were still inside the reservation guard line, the wall was regularly dotted with the rifle towers.

Leisurely, so as not to arouse suspicion, they got off the truck. Straight knocked on the rear door of the warden's house. Holohan's Chinese cook appeared in the doorway.

"We've come to fix the door," Straight said.

"Velly good. You come in."

The convicts entered. Six Chinese trusties, their yellow faces expressionless, were working as household servants in the kitchen. Without more ado the four desperadoes whipped out guns and covered the Chinese.

"Hands up and shut up!" Straight warned. "I mean business."

Opening a pantry door he forced the Chinese into the closet. They filed into the dark room with Oriental stoicism.

"Keep quiet in there," Straight grated meaningly. "I'll shoot through the door if you don't."

He shut the door quietly and turned the key in the lock. The four were alone in the kitchen. Straight gazed into the tense faces of his accomplices. The light of impending freedom blazed feverishly in their eyes. Their lips were thin, bloodless slashes in pale, taut masks.

"Follow me!" Straight rapped out.

At the head of the table sat Director Stephens. His back was to the kitchen door. Looking down the length of the dining table he saw Chairman Sykes' eyes widen in sudden alarm. Atherton's face paled simultaneously, Noon's mouth fell open but he did not speak. Warden Holohan's chair rasped on the floor in sudden movement. Everyone was looking in Stephens' direction. He became aware of a cool draft fanning the back of his neck.

Behind him a strange voice grated harshly.

"Stick 'em up, everybody! Quick!"

Stephens shot out of his chair like a marionette jerked upward by its control string. He whirled around. Facing him were four grim, savage-faced convicts, guns menacing in their hands.

"What . . ." he began.

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Alex McKay stepped forward, holding the biggest gun Stephens had ever seen. Mouthing an oath he jabbed the barrel deep into Stephens' midriff. McKay's fingers curled around the trigger, tightened spasmodically. Stephens screamed—but did not fall. The hammer fell harmlessly on a cartridge that failed to explode!

Straight grabbed McKay and hurled him back.

"None of that," he ordered. Then to the hushed group around the table: "One of you will have to come along with us. We won't harm you. But we want our freedom."

Atherton volunteered.

"I'm the father of four children, but someone has to go with you. I guess I'm elected. I'll take a chance on your word. Come on."

ATHERTON'S words drew all eyes toward him. Warden Holohan seized his chance. Silently for a man of his giant proportions, he rose from his chair. He lunged forward and grappled with Straight. Furiously fighting for possession of the gun, they crashed to the floor: a bewildering confusion of arms, legs, and the weapon, that prevented the other convicts from helping Straight. Besides, they had their hands full keeping the parole board members from the struggling pair on the floor.

Weakened as he was by a long illness, Holohan nevertheless was still a match for the desperate Straight. He seized the convict's gun hand and released the death grip he had on Straight's throat. Then he wrenched the gun loose and fought to struggle erect.

Maddened by the loss of his weapon Straight clawed after him. Clinging frenziedly to the warden he climbed to his feet. And then he struck.

Holohan took Straight's knee in the groin. Moaning with the excruciating pain he staggered back limply. The mob leader closed in and they reeled drunkenly into the adjoining room. Holohan tripped on a rug. Together they crashed again to the floor.

By this time Kristy and Landers had lined up the parole board and Noon against a wall and McKay went to Straight's aid.

Outnumbered two to one, weakened by Straight's kick, Holohan was beaten down. The gun was wrenched from his grasp. Enraged by this unexpected resistance, the pair of desperadoes slugged him repeatedly with their weapons. Blood spattered them and stained the rug. Again and again they struck at the defenseless warden sprawled on the floor.

Then they kicked him: cruel blows to the head and ribs with their heavy prison work shoes. But Holohan was beyond feeling. He was unconscious, his skull fractured.

Landers ran in from the dining room.

"Hey!" he yelled. "We don't want that kind of stuff!" Angrily he jerked his companions away from the unconscious warden. "Let's get out of here, you fools!"

Recalled to their senses, Straight and McKay returned to the dining room. Landers hesitated a moment, then lifted the senseless figure of the warden into a chair before joining his confederates.

Once more Straight resumed command. He was breathing heavily. Drops of blood stained his hands and prison garb. His eyes were still wild with blood lust.

"You two!" he spat at Stephens and

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Atherton. "Strip off your clothes. We're changing with you."

He disregarded Sykes and Noon. They were too big. The change took less than two minutes. Then Straight prodded Noon with his gun.

"Now, you," he growled. "They know you. Phone for the warden's car. Tell 'em to drive right up to the door."

Unarmed, helpless, Noon was forced to comply.

Landers, watching from a curtained window, announced the arrival of the car in a moment. At the wheel was Lieutenant Harry Jones, accompanied by C. L. Doose, both prison guards.

"They're coming up the stairs!" Landers whispered.

"Let 'em in!" Straight gritted.

Landers opened the door. Unsuspecting, Jones and Doose walked into the trap. They were unarmed, in accordance with prison regulations for guards on ground duty. Now they found themselves suddenly facing the menacing guns of four desperate convicts. The sight of the warden's bloody head in the room beyond further brought home to them the danger they were in.

Once more Straight prodded Noon into activity.

"We're going out! Phone the main guard tower! Tell 'em we're coming through and not to shoot!"

Noon looked around him helplessly. Under the grim stares of the convicts he picked up the telephone and talked into the transmitter, his voice shaking, his hand trembling.

"The whole parole board is coming out in the warden's car with me and two guards!" he told the guards in the main tower. "We are all covered with guns! Open the gates! Don't shoot at the car or you'll kill us all!"

INSTANTLY the four convicts rushed their prisoners out to the warden's limousine. Jones was shoved behind the wheel to drive, with Kristy and Landers beside him. The others piled in the rear. Doose clung to the running board of the car, a living shield for the escaping convicts.

In the reservation a trusty shouted a warning of the break.

Already the big machine was rolling, gathering speed. Prodded by guns at his side and back, Jones had to step on the throttle. The heavy machine lurched out of the short driveway. Its spinning wheels spewed up a shower of gravel, and with Jones' foot heavy on the gas they raced through the open main gate. In the machine gun towers above the helpless guards cursed beside their silenced guns. Noon's warning prevented them from shooting.

A moment later the prison siren blasted out its shrill warning of the prison break. The prison switchboard came alive and flashed out the news. A direct line across the bay to the Berkeley police department broadcast by radio to all cruiser cars in Northern California the flash of the most sensational and daring prison break in the annals of the West.

Only once did the fleeing convicts slow down. A mile outside the last prison fence they pushed Doose off the running board.

"Tell 'em we'll kill the whole parole board if they try to stop us!" Straight yelled.

Cruelly he brought his gun down on Doose's fingers, clinging for dear life to the door of the limousine. With a scream of anguish Doose went spinning down an embankment. The fleeing machine vanished in a cloud of dust, carrying the escaping convicts and their parole board hostages.

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Meanwhile all California was arming. The prison siren screamed and wailed of the escape. Telephones hummed. Police radios crackled. Teletypes ticked with the news of the daring break. Every law officer went into action.

San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, San Rafael, Santa Rosa, Sausalito, and Martinez hastily organized riot squads. Fast radio cruiser cars went into action. Thompson submachine guns were issued, gas guns parcelled out, riot guns unlimbered. Police specials and forty-fives were loaded and tested. Gas bomb kits and hand grenades were prepared for action. The Berkeley police radio station, with a radius of 500 miles, broadened its transmitting wave to interfere with all other communication. Ferry piers at Berkeley, Richmond, Sausalito, and San Francisco were placed under guard.

A drawbridge on the Black Point cutoff road, only route from San Quentin to the Sacramento Valley of Central California, was ordered opened and kept open at all costs.

Every road in Marin, Sonoma, Solano, and Contra Costa counties was blocked by heavily armed posses. Highway patrolmen converged towards San Quentin. The preparations were like a huge hand slowly closing into a fist to crush out the life of an unwary insect caught in its palm.

In the metropolitan centers, city editors shrieked assignments to star reporters and ace cameramen. News rooms were mad houses. Legmen flashed every bulletin to their city desks.

Ferry service on San Francisco Bay was at a standstill. In the words of more than one newspaperman: "All hell had broken loose!"

FOLLOWING a pre-arranged plan, the convicts raced through Greenbrae and made for San Rafael, county seat of Marin County. Behind them, like a far flung queue, trailed pursuit cars from San Quentin loaded with rifle-armed guards. But no shots were fired. The five hostages the desperadoes had taken with them were like a safe-conduct pass.

Sixty, seventy, eighty miles an hour they fled over the back roads. Sweat poured down the face of Lieutenant Jones, hunched over the wheel of the racing limousine. They swirled through San Rafael at sixty miles an hour, a miracle of driving.

Police Chief Sabin Kane, with a caravan of five cars loaded with hurriedly sworn in deputies, picked up the pursuit but dared not close in. Fear for the safety of the parole board members silenced their guns.

North over the Redwood Highway fled the escaping convicts. At Oro Fino Bill's service station they swung to the right, headed for the Black Point cutoff. Once a state highway patrolman tried to halt them by swinging his white motorcycle across the center of the road. The hurtling limousine clipped it and flung it aside. Only by a prodigious last minute leap did Captain Carl O'Connor escape with his life. Ruefully he gazed at the pile of junk that had been his motor mount.

The convicts roared onward. Ahead loomed the Black Point cutoff drawbridge.

It was open! They couldn't get through!

With brakes squealing and smoking the heavy limousine lurched to a stop. The convicts cursed with rage. Straight turned on Noon and threw him out of the car.

"Get out!" he screamed. "We're

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going back! Tell your blamed posses to let us through or we'll kill the whole parole board! You—behind the wheel! Turn around! We're going back the way we come!"

Back the car raced to the turnoff. Then north through Ignacio, and west, towards the Sonoma County coast country, a region of rolling hills and numerous but baffling and unfamiliar side roads. Smugglers of the prohibition era, who landed their wares on the beaches of the coast, and hijackers who looted them of their cargoes, had fought many pitched battles on these backroads.

Meanwhile Noon was picked up by the pursuit cars.

"Don't shoot, don't shoot!" he begged the lawmen. "The whole board and a guard is still in the car. They'll kill them without mercy if you start shooting."

Thwarted in their plan to unite with Clyde Stevens' gang, the escaping convicts now were forced to head towards the coast. Every attempt they made to turn north or east was blocked by pursuit cars. Trucks were swung across the roads at every intersection. Automobiles and motorcycles formed barriers. Baffled and harried, the convicts were turned in towards the coast. Slowly but surely the encircling fist was closing in on them, driving them into a cul-de-sac from which there was no escape. The realization made a madman of Straight.

FROM Santa Rosa in the north, Sheriff Harry Patteson and carloads of deputies raced south to cut off the bandits.

At Tomales, a sleepy coast dairy hamlet, District Attorney Albert L. Bagshaw of Marin County, in office just a week, was trying a case in the justice court. Constable John Bones rushed into the courtroom.

"There's been a prison break at San Quentin!" he shouted. "Sheriff Walter Sellmer says they're heading this way and to get ready for 'em!"

Followed by Bones and Deputy Sheriff Edmund Blum, Bagshaw set out in his car to head off the fugitives. Before he could block the highway with his car the convicts' machine roared around a curve and flashed by.

Lieutenant Jones, still at the wheel, shouted a desperate plea as he flashed by the district attorney's posse.

"Don't shoot for the love of heaven!"

But Blum and Bones were not to be denied. Dead shots both—deer hunting is good in the north coast counties—they opened fire. Bones scored a direct hit on the left rear tire of the fleeing car. The machine lurched crazily across the road, but swept on unchecked. Bagshaw swung his car around in pursuit. Back through Tomales, where the citizens, unaware of the hostages in the convicts' car, took pot shots at the big machine as it swept through the village!

There Sheriff Patteson joined District Attorney Bagshaw. The posses were now shooting at the fleeing car, trying to hit the tires. Lead began to riddle the limousine. Convicts and parole board directors huddled together on the floor. Bullets whined past Lieutenant Jones' head, bent low over the steering wheel.

Behind him Director Sykes cried out in pain. His hand clutched his side, came away stained crimson. He did not know it but a coin had deflected the bullet, saving his life.

Straight cursed horribly, half insane.

"Throw that guy behind the wheel

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out!" he screeched. "Tell 'em we'll wipe out the rest if they don't stop chasing us. I'm going to drive!"

The car slowed. Jones hurtled the machine and Straight hunched down behind the wheel. The maneuver brought the pursuit dangerously close. Bullets whined through the limousine. Stephens cried out as he was hit in the side. Another tire was hit.

The car careened wildly, rubber flapping noisily. Straight gibbered, tugging at the obstinate, insensate wheel. It was the end.

"Run for it!" Straight screamed. "We're going to crash! Jump!"

The hurtling sedan plunged downhill towards the village of Valley Ford. The car yawed crazily across the road and crashed into the Valley Ford Creamery garage at the foot of the hill.

From the machine tumbled convicts and parole board members. The convicts sprinted to the garage building for a last desperate stand. The parole board members sought shelter from the hail of lead. From all directions armed men converged on the convicts' stronghold. Bagshaw, rifle in hand, crept stealthily towards the rear of the building.

Constable Bones shouted a warning behind him.

"Al! He's behind you!"

Bagshaw whirled and fired. Rudolph Straight's murderous eyes, glaring insanely over the sights of his automatic, took on a stunned, bewildered look. There was a round hole in his forehead. Soundlessly he pitched forward. He was dead before he fell.

"The rest of you in there," Sheriff Patteson called out. "Come on out—with your hands up!"

Inside the riddled garage guns thudded loudly on the wooden flooring. In single file the cowed convicts walked out. One had a bullet crease on the side of his head.

The prison break had failed.

AN hour later, a teletype ticked into San Francisco police headquarters from San Quentin prison, where the captured felons were being sweated.

"Clyde Stevens was brains of prison break. He furnished guns. Convicts were to join him in Berkeley. Hideout on Sherman Island in Sacramento River. He is armed and dangerous. Convicts confessed.

Charles Dullea, captain of inspectors, ripped the teletype from the machine.

"Let's go!" he told the picked squad of detectives around him. "This is the wind up. I don't want any mistakes."

Across the bay by auto ferry, then north to Martinez. They picked up Sheriff John Miller of Contra Costa County and Chief Al Leroy of Antioch. It was a formidable posse by nightfall.

Splitting his men into two squads, Dullea commandeered Joe Bertucci's motorboats at Antioch. Dullea led one squad, Inspector Homer Van Matre the other. The motorboats headed for Sherman Island, an inky smudge under the star-studded night sky and not very far away.

As the detectives landed, three shadowy figures loomed on the rim of Sherman Island. Van Matre called out:

"Throw up your hands."

Two of the figures did, but the third turned and fled. Van Matre's gun barked once and the figure stumbled and fell, cursing. The inspectors raced up the bank and surrounded the trio.

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The wounded man was Albert Kessel!

The other two were Albert Lee and an island caretaker, in no way connected with the gang.

"Where's Stevens?" Van Matre asked Kessel.

"He ain't here!" Kessel gritted. "He's in Boston!"

"Yeah? Well, we'll look anyway," Van Matre said.

The posse spread out and searched through the brush in the dark. They covered half the island before they saw a light in the distance. Stealthily they crept up until they could discern the outline of a shack. The cabin was surrounded silently. Then Van Matre knocked on the door.

A woman appeared. Mrs. Lee. Beyond her, in the dim interior, Van Matre glimpsed a movement on the couch. With his gun gripped for action he pushed into the room, followed by the posse.

Stevens was lying on the couch!

"So this is Stevens! San Francisco's Public Enemy No. 1!" Van Matre grinned.

"I ain't Stevens!" the man on the couch denied vehemently. "You got me wrong, copper." But his hands rose high at sight of the police specials trained on him. Van Matre shrugged.

"Search him, boys!"

Two burly detectives threw themselves on the prisoner. In a moment one stood up. In his hand he held a weapon which he studied with amazed unbelief.

"Well I'm damned!" he ejaculated. "Look, Inspector! It's Lieutenant Williams' forty-five! This is Stevens, all right. He got this gun in that bank job at the Hotel Whitcomb. And he's carried it ever since!"

Fingerprint comparisons later confirmed the identification. But Stevens declined to talk. Sullenly he pleaded guilty to three counts of robbery and was sentenced to Folsom penitentiary for seven years to life. Kessel fared similarly.

The three convicts captured after the prison break automatically drew life sentences. However, District Attorney Bagshaw, who killed Straight, secured indictments under the state's kidnaping law which invoked the death penalty.

Although Alexander McKay, a British subject, took his appeal to the supreme court, the governor, and the prime minister and the king of England, he was hanged with Joe Kristy in March of 1936 for his part in the kidnaping of the parole board and the wild prison break.

Kessel, in his prison cell, made the concluding statement in the most audacious prison break in the history of California and the West.

"If things hadn't gone wrong we'd have made Dillinger's mob look like pikers!"

But Straight, McKay, and Kristy are not alive to confirm this boast.

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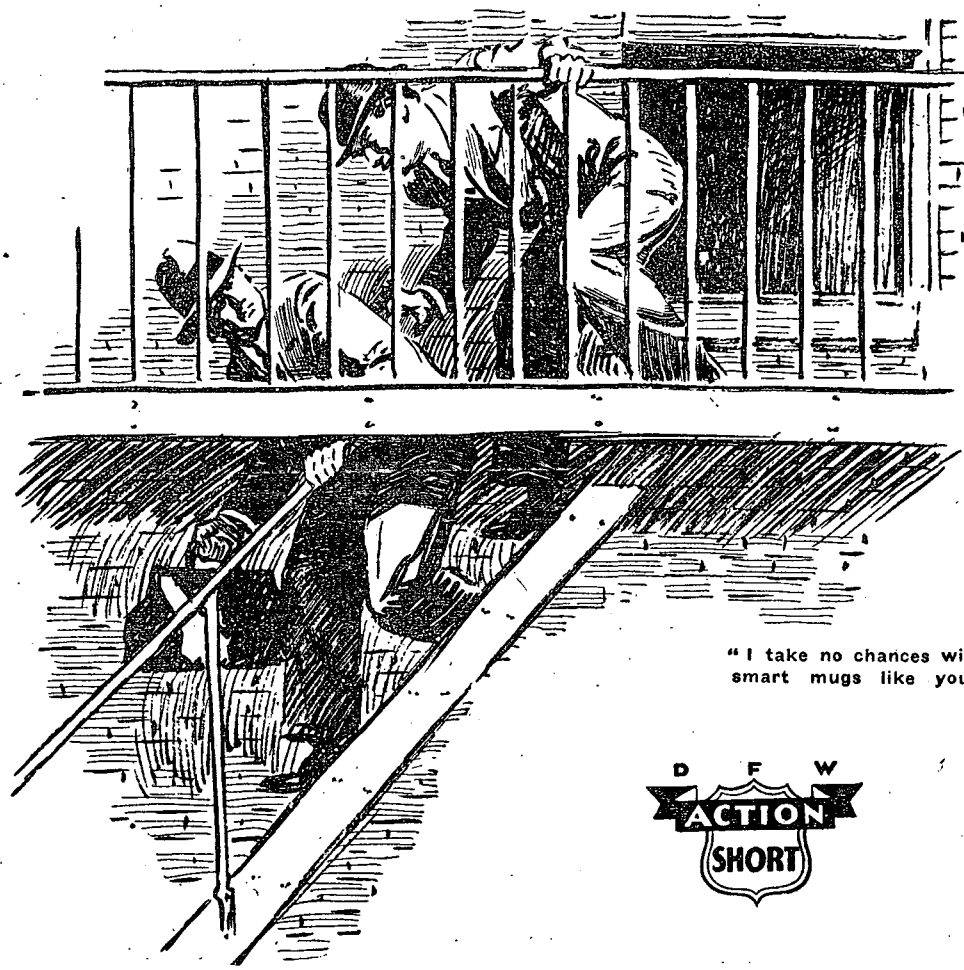
Murderer's Fee

By

Norman A. Daniels



"I take no chances with smart mugs like you!"

D F W ACTION SHORT

Why Was It that Dr. Evans, of the Coroner's Office, Found Clues That Crack Dicks of the Homicide Squad Couldn't See?

DR. EMORY EVANS, Assistant Coroner, braked his car to a stop in front of 235 West Street. He saw a heavy touring car nosed in to the curb with the rear end far out in the street. That would be a police squad car. He grinned, got out and, carrying his professional bag, he hurried toward the one-family house. As he stepped on the porch, he noticed

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a brass sign on the wall beside the door.

"Stephen Granard, Physician," he read it aloud. "One of the profession this time, I guess."

Sergeant Abbott of the Homicide Squad dropped his cigarette to the rug and ground it out when Evans came into the room. He scowled at the doctor and winked at one of the patrolmen lounging near the door.

"Well, if it ain't Doc Evans, the nosiest coroner's assistant in the world. Come on in, doc. It's a suicide."

"Hello, Sergeant," Evans said. He removed his coat, hung it neatly on the back of a chair and rolled up his sleeves. He drew out a report blank and filled in the name of Stephen Granard, M.D.

"How do you know it's suicide, Sergeant?" he asked gently.

"Because it's as plain as the nose on your face, that's what it is. Take a look! He stabbed himself right through the heart with one of those scalpels you hack people up with. He is Doc Granard—don't that mean anything to you?"

"Granard?" Evans frowned. "Granard? That does sound familiar, but I can't place it."

"He got mixed up in a stock deal and he was indicted only a couple of days ago. He would have gone up for at least five to ten, so he took the easiest way out, see? That's just like a doctor, anyway."

Evans smiled. He knelt beside the body and pulled off the sheet covering it. The man was about forty. Buried within two inches of its entire length, a gleaming scalpel protruded from his breast directly over the heart.

"Did you dust it yet?" Evans asked without looking up.

"Yeah. There are prints on it—prints of the dead guy. Nobody else handled it. Now listen, doc, you're not going to tell me this wasn't suicide, are you?"

Evans didn't reply. He picked up the dead man's right hand and sniffed of it. Finally he sat the corpse up, removed the coat and saw that the sleeves were rolled elbow high. Again he sniffed of the forearm. He stood up and opened the doctor's bag resting on the table beside the corpse. It contained the instruments and medication of the dead man. Vials of drugs were neatly arranged and emergency instruments were well wrapped.

"Sergeant," Evans turned to the detective, "you're wrong in this. Dr. Granard didn't kill himself. He was murdered and I'll stake my professional reputation on it. There are two distinct clues right in front of you. Do I have to have pictures drawn before you can see them?"

"Baloney," Abbott grunted. "I been over this room—every inch of it. There are no clues. Listen, doc, I'm a cop, see? I've been trained in this business and I say it's suicide."

"All right," Evans said. "So far as you are concerned, there are no clues and it's suicide. You can phone for the morgue wagon and return to headquarters. You're simply bull-headed, Sergeant. I'll have to save your face by turning the murderer over to you when I've caught him."

Abbott snorted in contempt. "That's okay with me. I'll tell the newspaper boys that the big shot Dr. Evans, of the Coroner's Office, found clues that crack dicks from the Homicide Squad couldn't see. When you find out you're wrong, you can explain to them—not me."

But Evans was already walking toward the hallway. He saw a telephone on a small table and turned his head

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long enough to countermand one order.

"I'll phone the morgue myself, Sergeant. You can run along. Just leave one man to watch the body until it's taken away."

Evans sat down at the phone and dialed the morgue. His eyes rested on a prescription pad beside the phone. There were some barely legible marks scribbled on it. He ripped off the blank and studied it carefully.

"672 Grand Avenue," he made out the words. "That must have been the address of a call he had to make. Hm—not so bad for a starter."

HE gave curt directions to the clerk at the morgue and went back to the body. He went through the pockets and found nothing of consequence. There were only two one-dollar bills in a battered wallet. But folded in a small compartment were newspaper clippings. Evans read them hurriedly. They gave a vivid description of the plight Dr. Granard had been in. As a member of a failing stock firm he was being held liable for thousands of dollars lost by mishandling. The entire staff of officers had been indicted and the trial was only two days off. One clipping stated that Dr. Granard had turned over every cent of available cash he owned in trying to forestall the inevitable crash.

"There was a motive for suicide all right," Evans told himself. "I hardly blame Sergeant Abbott. What with the fingerprints of the dead man on one of his own scalpels and no indication of a fight, it certainly looks as though Granard took his own life. But—Abbott doesn't know what to do. He wouldn't believe me if I explained it to him, so I'll have to handle this affair myself to protect him."

He went out to his own car, got in and headed toward Grand Avenue and the address written on that slip of paper. Evans knew only too well how a doctor inevitably scribbles down an address given him over the phone.

672 Grand Avenue proved to be a cheap hotel rooming house. Evans stuck his bag under his arm and walked in. A frowsy desk clerk looked up sleepily.

"I'm looking for a doctor who came in a short time ago," Evans said. "What room did he go to? I'm here on a consultation with him."

"A guy with a bag somethin' like yours came in with another guy about two hours ago, but I ain't seen him again, mister."

"Do you handle the telephone switchboard?" Evans inquired.

"Yeah—I handle it, boss."

Evans opened a phone book, found Dr. Granard's number and reached in his pocket for a five-dollar bill.

"This case is very important," he said. "Someone phoned Security 3-5591 about two hours ago. Now, if you could remember what room that call came from—"

He exposed the edge of the five-dollar bill and the clerk took immediate interest.

"Oh, sure. I remember now. A guy in room 51 called that number, boss. I dunno what he said, though. I was busy, so I didn't—er—listen."

Evans left the bill on the desk and hurried to the stairs. He scorned the rickety rope-controlled elevator. At the second floor he paused and looked out the fire escape. This could form a ready back exit from any of the floors.

He paused in front of room 51 and considered. After all, that phone message might have been a legitimate call and Dr. Granard had been murdered when he returned to the office.

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Evans grimaced and listened at the door. Someone was pacing the floor with quick, nervous steps.

"He's worried, whoever he is," Evans told himself. "We'll see."

He tapped briskly at the door. Instantly the restless pacing stopped and a harsh voice came from the room.

"Whaddya want?"

"I'm a doctor," Evans said. "A colleague of mine called here not long ago and told me to meet him in front of the hotel. Can you tell me what happened to him?"

THE key grated in the lock and the door swung open. A thick-set man kept one hand behind him while he gestured for Evans to walk in.

"Are you a doctor?" he demanded half belligerently.

Evans indicated his professional bag. "I am. But where is Dr. Granard?"

"Well, you see, it's like this. We had Doc Granard come here and he fixed up the sick guy so he could be moved. He went with the patient to another place. But he didn't say he had a date to meet anybody."

"Naturally," Evans answered blithely. "We don't make it a practice to talk about one patient to another. I suppose the best thing I can do is go back and wait until he returns."

"You didn't go to his office, doc?"

"Oh, no. I've been out making my evening calls and just stopped here on my way back. Thank you for the information. I'll be going along."

"Wait a second, doc." The man grabbed Evans by the arm. "Maybe you oughta see Doc Granard, huh? I know where he's at and I think he needs somebody to help him with this case."

"Sorry," Evans answered. "I can't barge in without his calling me personally. Against ethics, you know. I'll go back to his office. Just tell him he can reach me there."

Evans started for the door, but he stopped with one hand reaching toward the knob. There was the point of a gun shoved hard against the small of his back.

"You'll come all right," the man snapped. "I said he needed some help and he does. What's more, you're the mug what's gonna provide it. Got everything you need in that bag?"

"Now, wait a moment," Evans protested. "I don't like this being compelled to accompany you at the point of a gun. As for the instruments and medication, how do I know whether or not I have the necessary materials? I don't even know what kind of a case I'm going out on."

"You'll know damned soon. A guy got cut, see? He tripped and fell on a knife and he's in a bad way. Pick up that bag and walk alongside of me. Remember, I got a gat pointed right at you. Make a squawk and you get it. Come on, get started!"

Evans walked out of the room. As he passed the fire escape exit in the hall, his captor barked a command.

"Wait a minute!" The man prodded his side with his weapon. "We're going down the fire escape. I got a car in back. You ain't gonna give no signal to your chauffeur, and we ain't going in your bus, either."

"That's perfectly all right with me," Evans said. "If there is a man who needs medical care, it's my duty to help him. You don't need a gun."

"I take no chances with smart mugs like you. Walk down and take it slow unless you want to get flattened with a slug."

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There was a car parked in the alley behind the hotel. It was a heavy sedan. Evans' captor motioned him into the back seat. He looked around for a moment and then, as Evans climbed in, he swung the revolver down in a murderous arc.

Caught unprotected, Evans took the butt of the heavy gun on the side of the head. He slumped half in and half out of the car. Vaguely he realized he was being picked up and dumped bodily into the floor of the tonneau. The starter whirred and the car headed for the street.

Evans tried to rouse himself from the partial stupor resulting from the cowardly blow, but he knew that if he moved, the gunman would wield his improvised blackjack again, with probably more serious consequences. Evans relaxed and lay quietly resting, building up strength for the ordeal that was certain to follow.

II

THE car turned sharply and the city lights faded as it drove down an alley. The smell of water and the sound of lapping waves against the docks gave Evans a clue to his whereabouts. He was near the river.

The sedan lurched to a stop. Someone ran out to meet it, and this newcomer and the driver talked in monotone whispers. Evans knew that manner of speech. He had heard it several times before—in various prisons. It was the jargon adopted by men who were refused the privilege of talking aloud.

The door opened and he was hauled out bodily. The second man picked up his bag and stuck it beneath his arm. Then he grasped Evans' feet, and between the two men he was carried into an empty building of huge size. The sound of the men walking echoed hollowly from the rafters and widespread walls.

They climbed a flight of stairs. Another voice, talking in that same hoarse manner, greeted them. Evans felt himself flung upon the floor. A glass of water was dashed on his face and he pretended to be recovering for the first time. He sat up groggily and wiped the water from his eyes.

"What—what's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"You'll find out. Get up, you lousy pill roller. We got a job for you, and if you don't do it better than the other guy, we'll fill you full of lead."

Evans stood up. He faced three leering men. One was the crook who occupied the hotel room. The other two he recognized instantly. Both were escaped convicts from the penitentiary twenty miles up state. Vividly Evans recalled the spectacular escape in which one guard had been killed by a knife wound and one of the prisoners who got away, stabbed by the same knife in a close hand-to-hand fight. These men were desperate. Human life meant nothing to them. Evans could feel cold perspiration forming in little globules at the back of his neck.

"I—I don't know what you mean," he managed. "If someone is hurt, I'll willingly see what I can do."

"I'll say you will. Shane—take him in to see Mugs. You better go with him, Pete. I'll stay here and watch, just in case somebody tailed you."

"Nobody even saw us go out, Pete," the occupant of the hotel room said.

Evans followed the two men into an ill-lit supply room, where he found a man stretched on a pile of burlap. Moans came from the swollen lips

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and the injured convict's hands were twitching in agony. Evans knelt beside him, motioned for the bag, but had to wait until the two crooks searched it.

"He ain't got a roscoe on him," Pete reported. "I searched him after I knocked him cold. Okay, doc, fix that guy up and do a good job of it. We gotta travel pretty soon."

"What happened to him?" Evans asked. "What kind of a knife did he fall on?"

Shane laughed harshly. "It was a big one, and he got it good. We had another guy try to fix him up, but he did a rotten job. If you don't do better, doc, you're gonna be damned sorry."

Evans removed the dirty blanket and carefully cut away the neatly placed bandage which the murdered Dr. Granard had wound around the wound. He exposed a puffed and obviously infected knife wound.

"How long since he was hurt?" he asked as he prepared his instruments. "We'll have to report this to the police, you know. This man didn't stab himself—not with that wound."

"We'll do nothin' of the kind," Shane retorted. "I tell you this was an accident. Now be a good guy, and fix him up quick. Make him stop that damned groaning. It's giving me the willies."

EVANS went to work. Time enough later to deal with these men. Now he had a badly injured man to treat, and that came first. The knife had penetrated deeply. Dr. Granard's work had been efficient enough, but this patient needed constant attention to the drainage of the wound. The murder of Granard had been the most foolish thing these convicts could have done. Had they permitted him to live and remain in attendance, the injured crook would have been out of danger by this time.

"What's the matter with the other doctor?" Evans demanded as he worked. "This man needs attention every moment. I'll have to return every two or three hours for at least a day."

"Return nuthin'," Shane growled. "You stay right here until we're able to move him. Then we'll pay you off."

Evans didn't see the significant wink Shane gave to Pete, but he did sense the sinister double meaning to the words. He carefully disinfected the wound and placed a new drain in it. The patient's eyes flickered open at the pain, and there was fear in them until he took in his surroundings. Evans finished his dressing, prepared a hypodermic of morphine and administered it. The prick of the needle roused the wounded man.

"Remember, Zamora, I travel with you," he said weakly. "Leave me, and you get none of the dough. It's a good thing for me I'm the only guy that knows where it is."

Then the drug worked on him. He fell into a deep sleep.

"Walk into the other room, doc!" Shane ordered crisply. "Don't make any funny passes."

Evans obeyed. He dropped into a rickety straight-backed chair, and folded his hands on his lap. The third crook, evidently the leader, and a convicted murderer known as Zamora, grinned at him.

"How will you take your fee, doc—in the heart or the head?"

Evans gulped. "Do—do you mean you're going to kill me?" he asked unsteadily. "I—I haven't done anything to you men. If it's because I advised

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that police be notified—why—you can forget all about that."

"Sure we can, but we forget easier when guys who know us can't talk. Don't stall, doc! You know damned well who we are. The papers been printin' our mugs for two days now."

"I don't know," Evans insisted. "Really I don't. You see, I have little time to read the papers. I suspect your friend in that next room was stabbed in a fight and you want to keep the facts hidden. I heard him tell you that he alone knew where something was hidden, and that you couldn't leave him to die. Other than that I know nothing."

"You're guessin' damned close then." Zamora's black eyes flashed dangerously. "We kicked our way outa the big house and we left a stiff behind us—a lousy screw who tried to get in our way. But he got the knife away from our pal in the next room, and he used it. We fixed the dirty rat for that, all right, and Mugs didn't think he was hurt bad."

"Oh!" Evans said very slowly. "I see. Now, to insure yourselves, you want to kill me. But that isn't necessary. Tie me up until you can get away."

"Nuthin' doin'," Zamora grated. The cops are lookin' for us in Philly. Once they think we're in this town, they'll block every damned road. You gotta take it, doc."

"But if you kill me, that man in the next room will die. And he'll go out with his lips sealed. You want your share of the money, don't you?"

"Yeah," Pete broke in, "if Mugs croaks, what'll we do? We need that dough, and he won't tell us where it is."

Zamora faced Evans and his gun sagged just a little. "How long before we can move Mugs?" he demanded.

"Tomorrow morning, if I am permitted to attend him until then. That stab wound is very deep. It must be watched. The patient already has a fever showing a definite infection. Let me live and I'll see that he doesn't die. You can tie me up. I promise not to talk."

ZAMORA considered. Evans knew that any promise from this killer would be worth nothing, but if only he could gain time—time to get these men singly.

"Okay, doc. It's a bargain. But remember, if you try to make a getaway, we'll stop you with lead. How often you gotta see Mugs?"

"Constantly," Evans said. "I can't even leave the building. He needs injections every half hour to keep his heart going and to work the fever down. I have plenty of medicine with me."

"Pete!" Zamora turned to the crook who had occupied the hotel room. "You get busy. Make sure nobody thinks we're in town. The cops ain't looking for you, so you can get around okay. Come back in about two hours. Better bring some grub and see if you can dip up some more dough. Damn Mugs! If I knew where he hid that money, I'd bump him right now."

Pete nodded and left. Evans heard the heavy car start up and move out of the alley.

"One gone," he told himself softly. "Now, if I could get Zamora out of here—but how? He'd suspect I've got something up my sleeve if I send him away, and they may tie me up."

"I ought to see the patient again," Evans said. "One of you can come in there with me."

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"Yeah?" Zamora grunted. "We'll both come in. We ain't takin' any chances on you pulling any fancy stunts. Go ahead, get goin'!"

Evans walked into the improvised sick room.

He made a cursory examination of the wounded convict.

"Zamora," he said, without looking up, "this man is worse. I've got to open that wound to drain it better, and I need boiling water to sterilize my instruments. Unless you want this man to die, you'll have to get it immediately."

Zamora hesitated. Sympathy for the wounded man didn't enter the case so far as he was concerned, but the knowledge that Mugs alone knew the hiding place of the loot they had stolen, made the saving of Mugs a necessity. Zamora promised himself the pleasure of killing Mugs once he had his hands on the hidden money.

"Listen, Shane," Zamora said to his fellow convict, "I'm gonna start that gas stove downstairs in the office, and heat some water. You keep your gat on this doc every second. Don't let him get the drop on you. I'll be back in five minutes."

Shane pulled his gun and kept it trained on Evans. The doctor went to his bag and removed an oversized hypodermic needle. Grimly he removed the plunger, and from a small vial filled the chamber with a colorless liquid.

"What's that you're doin'?" Shane demanded. "That stuff smells like ammonia to me."

"It's a sedative," Evans said softly. He inserted the plunger, tightened the needle on the tip, and took a firm grip of the instrument.

"I'll need your help in this," he said to Shane. "Reach down and lift your friend's arm. I've got to make an intra-muscular injection."

Shane was suspicious, but he obeyed. He picked up Mugs' right arm, but he watched Evans, and kept his gun on him. Evans turned the needle toward the gunman, and suddenly depressed the plunger as hard as he could. A thin stream of liquid shot out and struck Shane full in the eyes. With a howl of agony he stood up and tried to bring his gun to bear. Evans hit him with everything he had, and the crook careened across the room, hit the wall and sagged to the floor, his eyes brimming with tears. He was in terrific pain.

Evans picked up his gun. He took surgical tape from his kit, and in sixty seconds Shane was helpless.

"That was ammonia," Evans grinned at the half conscious man. "Spirits of ammonia. You'll get over it quickly enough. Now be quiet, or I'll bash you one."

A board squeaked in the next room. Evans whirled about. Zamora was crouched and moving toward him like a great animal preparing for the kill. He gripped a gun, and he had the drop on Evans.

"Let go of that rod," he ordered grimly, "or I'll plant a bullet where it hurts the most. Drop it—you two-timing rat."

Evans shrugged and let his purloined gun thud to the floor.

"I had an idea you was up to some smart trick," Zamora gloated. "That's why I sneaked back. So you put Shane out of business, huh? Well, that's doin' me a favor. Now listen—you wake Mugs up, see? Wake him up and give him somethin' that will make him talk. I don't give a damn if he croaks two minutes afterwards, but if you don't make him tell me where the

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dough is hidden, you'll wish to hell you did."

"But how can I do such a thing?" Evans protested. "Mugs is dying. Of course, I can wake him up, but that doesn't mean he will talk. Your only hope is to let me heal Mugs so he can travel."

"You heard what I said," Zamora grated. "Either he talks or you pass out—damned slow."

Evans knew that Zamora was desperate. No excuses would suffice. The burly killer wanted only one thing—to know where Mugs had hidden the money that would spell safety for an escaped convict.

EVANS knelt beside the wounded man again. Still on one knee, he turned around to face Zamora. The big killer watched narrowly, but Zamora wasn't familiar with football tactics. He didn't know that a kneeling man has a far better opportunity to begin a tackle. Evans suddenly leaped. Zamora's gun cracked and a bullet sang uncomfortably close to Evans' ear. But his arms gripped the killer around the knees and Zamora came tumbling down like the halfbacks of Evans' college days.

The killer tried to use his gun. Evans cracked him under the chin. Momentarily dazed, Zamora didn't resist when Evans kicked the gun out of his grip. But Zamora recovered with startling swiftness. His two long arms wound around Evans' middle and began to tighten. Evans knew that murderous hold would break his ribs with a little more pressure. He managed to work his own hands upward until they closed on Zamora's thick throat.

Things were growing hazy for Evans. The breath was squeezed out of him, and Zamora's pig-like eyes glittered in anticipation of the moment when Evans' ribs would crack.

He pressed his thumbs against the back of Zamora's neck, found the vulnerable spot he sought and pushed with all his waning strength. Zamora gasped. His grip released and his eyes bulged in agony. A second later he was unconscious.

Someone was racing through the big deserted warehouse. Someone attracted by the shooting. Was it the other escaped convict returning? Or was he still around town, perhaps at the hotel hideout getting information?

Evans scooped up the gun Zamora had dropped. He leveled it at the doorway, but let it sag when a blue-uniformed man filled the aperture.

"I'm Doctor Evans," he explained to the patrolman. "Phone headquarters for an ambulance and a patrol wagon.

"Also tell Sergeant Abbott to come here at once."

"I'll do that, doc," the patrolman said. "I'll send Murphy to put in the call while I stay here and help you hang on to that— Hey, it's Zamora you got there. He's a killer! Did you know that, doc?"

"I do." Evans smiled wryly and felt of his aching sides to assure himself no ribs were out of place. "He demonstrated effectively. Better put handcuffs on him while he is unconscious. He'll be like a roaring bull when he comes to."

III

A SHRIEK of sirens announced the arrival of a squad car. Evans greeted Sergeant Abbott with a wide grin. "Here," he said, "is where you are going to be convinced. Our surly friend over in the corner is

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Zamora, escaped killer. In the next room you'll find a man named Shane, properly tied up for delivery. There's a third man there also—someone known as Mugs. He's in bad shape from a stab wound, Sergeant. See that he gets to a hospital immediately—under guard, of course."

Abbott gaped. "How did you run across these three killers?" he demanded. "Every cop in the country is on the lookout for them. They busted out of the pen a couple of days ago."

"I know. They informed me of that fact. Mugs was stabbed in the escape. When he became too weak to travel, they had to remain here with him because Mugs alone knew where loot he had stolen at some time or other, was concealed. Mugs wouldn't talk, because he knew Zamora would kill him instantly. Mugs needed medical attention so—Dr. Granard was called in."

"Granard? Was he here? How do you know, doc?"

"The wound was dressed by an experienced man, Sergeant. Dr. Granard must have been that man. There is a fourth member of this mob whom you can pick up at 672 Grand Avenue if you work fast enough. He sent for Granard, forced him to come to this old warehouse and treat Mugs. Then Granard was escorted back to his home and murdered. They picked him out because they knew if his death could be made to resemble suicide, no suspicion would be aroused. Granard had the motives for suicide, and Zamora knew it."

"It ties up all right," Sergeant Abbott agreed reluctantly, "but I don't see how you were so damned sure Granard didn't kill himself."

"He was stabbed with a scalpel," Evans said briskly. "That's a mighty painful manner in which to put yourself out of the way. Especially when all Granard had to do was open his medical kit, take out a few small pills and swallow them. He could have chosen death that struck with lightning swiftness, or a death that came upon him while he slept under the influence of an overdose of drugs. Why then, should a man versed in these things pick the most painful way to commit suicide?"

"Well," Abbott said hesitatingly, "I thought of that, but there were Granard's prints on the knife, no clues to show anybody else had been in the room, and anyway, how does that bring Granard here—to treat Mugs?"

"Granard was a physician—not a surgeon. Under ordinary circumstances he would have refused to handle a case like Mugs! I knew that. Therefore, when I noticed Granard's sleeves rolled up and detected the odor of antiseptics about his hands and arms, I knew he had scrubbed for an operation. That, in itself, proved to me that Granard had been forced to do some kind of surgery, either with a gun poked into his back or through some extreme emergency. Coupled with his death, the former idea seemed to take first place in my mind."

Abbott fumbled with the ends of his necktie. "Well, thanks, doc. You made a sap out of me. That's what I get for thinking I'm too smart when I'm just dumb. The credit for this goes to you."

"Not me." Evans waved the officer away. "I'm too busy. Look here, I've been away from the office more than four hours. There will be half a dozen jobs waiting. Drive me to Grand Avenue, will you? My car is parked there."

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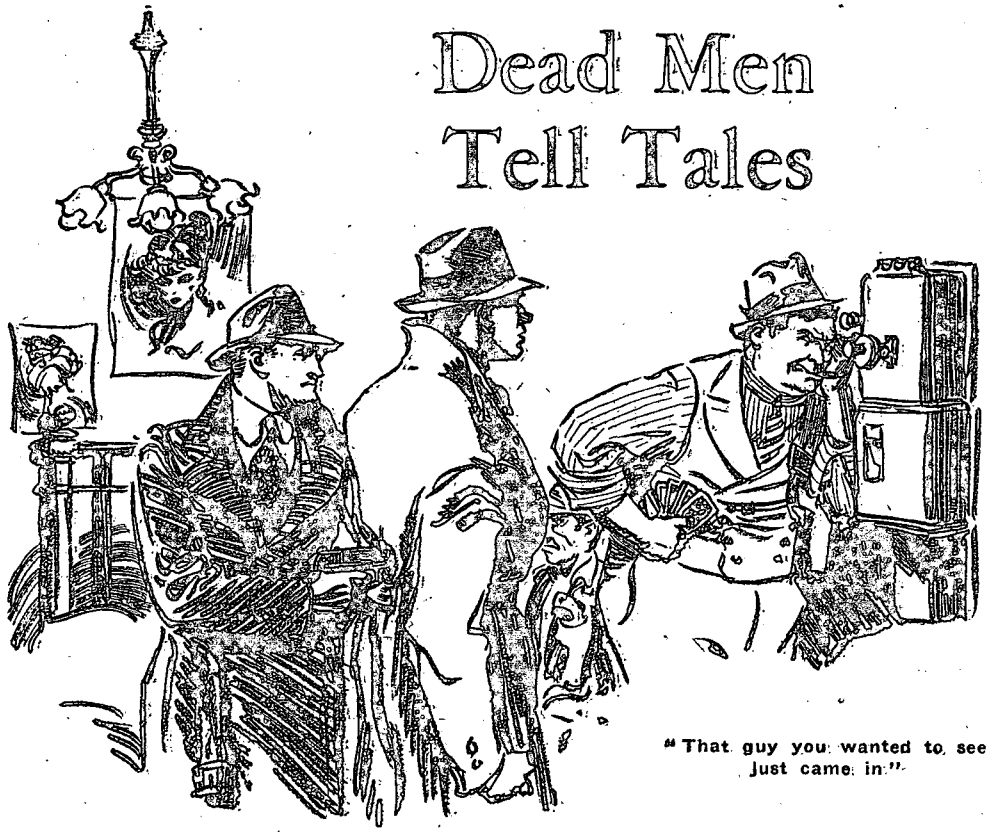
Dead Men Tell Tales



"That guy you wanted to see just came in."

By Fred MacIsaac

What has happened—

PRIVATE DETECTIVE TIM CODY and Stephen Steele had been roommates and close friends back at old Eli Evans School in Providence, so that when they met in New York after a lapse of years, the two young men decided that it would be a good idea to have a reunion and talk over old times.

Steve, the wealthy grandson of old Jonathan Steele, multi-millionaire owner of the Steele Motor Company, takes Tim to meet the glamorous Rhoda Robinson, an actress whom he had met a short while previously on the boat coming back from Europe. Rhoda and Steve are devoted to each other, and Steve decides to fly to California to tell his irascible old grandfather of his engagement to Rhoda. He leaves Newark Airport — entrusting Rhoda to Tim.

That Missing Finger of Steve Steele's Impostor — Could It Lead Detective Tim Cody to the Man Captaining the Murderous Conspiracy Against His Closest Friend?

A few days later the newspapers announce in screaming headlines that Jonathan Steele's grandson has been murdered. Tim and Rhoda are broken up over his death—which, according to the news-

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paper accounts, had happened amid unsavory surroundings in the Los Angeles negro section. Rhoda wishes to attend the funeral, but the Steele family, believing that she is an adventuress, denies her the privilege. Tim has a hunch that the whole case is phony, and decides to spend the legacy of ten thousand dollars which Steve had willed him in finding out the truth. He suspects that Steve is still alive and so he flies to Los Angeles to investigate.

On arriving in Los Angeles, Tim is met by two city detectives. Having had a "tip" that he is a tough guy from New York, they tell him they have orders to run him out of town. Tim phones Richard Barton, an attorney, a relative of Steve Steele's personal lawyer, for legal help. He comes immediately to Tim's hotel and puts the squeeze on the two flatfeet, who apologize to Tim.

Barton listens to Tim's ideas about the murder, and Barton, on the spur of the moment, decides that they should make a call on old Jonathan in Santa Barbara. He phones his sister, Clarice, a charming and witty girl, to pick them up in her car and drive them out.

After an hour of fast and furious driving, they arrive at the Steele estate, scale the surrounding wall, and are just about to enter the mansion when they are met by strong-arm guards who break up their little party. During the scuffle, Tim thinks he sees the face of Steve at one of the upper windows.

By overpowering the gate keeper they manage to leave the estate unapprehended, and return to Los Angeles.

Barton tells Tim that even if Steve is alive, they still have a huge fight on their hands, for Steve is now legally dead. Barton phones Parker B. Blake of the Steele Corporation, who requests that Tim have a talk with Lafe Morton, the personal representative of Patterson, president of the Steele Corporation.

CHAPTER X

An Ultimatum

WHEN I admitted Lafe Morton to my room, he looked familiar, but for a few minutes I couldn't place him. He appeared to be an Italian or an Armenian of dark handsome features with a slight hook to his nose. He was sleek, nattily dressed and he had a lot of personality.

"Glad to find you alone, Mr. Cody," he said, taking the chair toward which I nodded, "I understand you have a fellow named Barton as attorney. Blake says he's crazy as a loon."

"I'll have to be the judge of the sanity of my lawyer," I said stiffly. Privately I thought Blake was quite correct, but I wasn't admitting it.

"I'm going to be very frank. Mind if I smoke a cigarette?"

"Go ahead." I had him placed. As a plain clothes man in New York, I had never had any very important assignments, but we fellows got around and we made it our business to get squints at the underworld celebrities, just the way a cat can look at a queen. This fellow didn't know me from Adam but I knew him and his record.

He was an Italian named Giovanni Maroni and he had been the man behind three of the most prominent rackets. Before that he had been a bootlegger and the proprietor of a swanky night club. So he was the personal representative of Mr. Patterson. I understood now why the boys in the Loop in Chicago got after me so quickly and how it had been arranged to murder Steve Steele or the man who was supposed to be Steve Steele.

"Mr. Patterson was very much pleased with your handling of the Robinson girl. Of course, he didn't know she was a friend of yours when he gave you the assignment. He told me to tell you to forget the little argument in his office."

"Why that's fine," I said with a grin.

"He's a grand guy when you know him. He wanted me to tell you that he didn't know you were an old friend of

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young Steele's—naturally you wouldn't stand for digging up stuff on Rhoda Robinson. You see he didn't know, at the time, she was actually engaged to Steele. Of course, she must have been since the boy divided his mother's estate between you and her."

I nodded and watched him closely.

"But he can't get your idea in coming out here and making a fuss. Old Jonathan is a queer guy. He was shocked to find out that his grandson was a rounder. He sent out word he wanted the murderer punished, of course, but he wanted the publicity squashed. He's a Quaker, you know."

"Yes, I know."

"Now we've been looking things up. You never saw Steele from the day you two fellows graduated from that school in Providence until you ran into him the day before he left for California. Of course, you didn't know that he raised hell in Europe, that he got run out of a couple of countries as undesirable."

"Nope," I said coolly.

His manner changed. "Well, you know now. A lot of papers we don't advertise in would be tickled to put this yarn back on the front page. They'll make use of you the way they made use of Miss Robinson when she shot off her mouth out here. Do you want to be sensible?"

"Sure."

"Ten grand is chickenfeed, feller." He began to talk out of the side of his mouth. "You can make fifty grand by checking out of here and going back to New York where you belong."

"And if I don't?" I asked softly.

"Got any idea what you're up against? Most of the money in the world, kid."

"Jonathan Steele is a Quaker."

"In big business, they don't let the right hand know what the left hand is doing, brother."

"You mean I might get the heat, eh?"

"You know what I mean."

"I'll think it over, Mr. Maroni," I said with a grin. The man got livid.

"You—you, damn you—" he sputtered.

"You're out of your bailiwick, Maroni," I jeered. "And if you bumped off Steve Steele's pal in the town where you had Steve's throat cut, Mr. Jonathan Steele couldn't keep it off the front pages, I'm afraid. You tell Patterson all I want to do is to find out who killed my friend Steve. I'm going to find the real murderer and have him hanged and let's see you and the Steele Motor Corporation try to stop me."

MARONI had regained his composure. "Spend that ten grand as fast as you can. You won't need it where you're going," he said significantly. That was his exit speech.

I was breathing heavily. Although I knew he had a gun in a shoulder holster, I would have risked it to jump him and flatten his nose on his face. I knew, however, that I'd have to watch my step in Los Angeles. If I did anything violent, the police would love it and Dick Barton's influence probably had its limitations.

Anyway, the cat was out of the bag as far as Patterson was concerned. Fifty thousand to me if I'd quit and go home. A bullet in a vital spot if I didn't. And old Jonathan Steele, unwittingly, was paying the wages of Maroni and a gang of murderers.

I felt the need of a drink and I sent down for one. It was delivered by a bellboy who hung round waiting for his tip while I answered the phone. It was a call from Dick Barton.

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"I'll be stuck up here all the afternoon," he said. "You stay in your room until I call for you—I don't know what they may be cooking up for you, old Top."

"I've a fair idea," I told him, "just had a visit from Patterson's personal representative and a swell offer to forget the Steve Steele case and go back to New York. Very interesting angle"—I remembered the presence of the bellboy in time—"tell you when I see you."

"I'll be round about four-thirty. So long."

I hung up.

The bellboy was in his early twenties, a chubby, fresh, wise little coot. "You a detective, mister?" he demanded.

"What makes you think so, kid?"

"You talked about the Steele case. I saw a lot of that guy. I must have toted him thirty drinks."

"That so?"

"Yeh." He chuckled. "He gimme five dollars tip when I found his finger."

"You found his what?"

The boy laughed in keen enjoyment of my astonishment. "Sure, he had a false finger, the little finger of the left hand. It fitted on with a broad gold ring. He got plastered, fell on the floor and it dropped off. I found it where it had rolled, under the bed."

I drew a deep breath. "Did he tell you how he lost it?" I asked as calmly as I could.

"Yeh. It got shot off in a brawl in a gambling house at Las Vegas a couple of years ago. The false one was made of hard wax, he told me."

"What's your name?"

"Stephen Depoulos. My folks are Greeks."

"Here's a buck, Steve. Where's Las Vegas?"

"In Nevada close to the Boulder Dam. Much obliged. Want another drink?"

I HAD tossed off that one in a hurry. "No, that's all. On your way. Wait a minute. Here's another dollar. Send out and get me the papers for two days after the night that Steele was murdered."

"Okay, chief."

I walked up and down the room. Here was a ray of light, the first break for our side—no, the first break was seeing Steve in that room at Santa Barbara.

Steve hadn't worn a ring on the little finger of his left hand. He hadn't worn any rings. And he had all his fingers. And he certainly hadn't been in Las Vegas two or three years ago, because he had been in Europe all the time.

It meant that they had dug up somebody who looked something like him here in Los Angeles and their time was so short that they had to take a man with a missing finger.

And such a man could easily be identified. He would have acquaintances, perhaps relatives in Los Angeles. Not many people have a joint or two of their left hand little finger missing.

Boy, was this a break! Wait till I told Dick Barton. This was where he would come in. He knew the town.

In half an hour the bellboy was back with a stack of newspapers and I went through them very carefully. Where there had been a column in the New York papers there were pages here. But—not a published word to the effect that the corpse has a missing finger joint and wore a false joint held in place by a wide gold band.

I was sure the bellboy was telling the truth—so what did it mean? Well, it meant that the detail was carefully concealed from the newspaper men. Prob-

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ably they had been refused a view of the body. It meant the police were in on the hoax.

The man with the missing finger was dead. Probably other persons who had come into contact with the fellow during his impersonation of Stephen Steele would have noticed the gold ring. Rhoda and I knew that he wore no such ring and, without the ring, the stump of the finger would have been displayed.

Their first slip-up.

I began to get a glimmer of the truth. Steve had sent his grandfather a wire to the effect that he must see him to tell him something of tremendous importance. Patterson was informed of the wire. For some reason, he didn't want Steve to reach his grandfather, a reason so important he wouldn't balk at murder.

His accomplices in Los Angeles, perhaps the secretary of Jonathan Steele had dug up Steve's double and they had to take a man with a finger joint missing.

It meant that, when we rescued Steve, it wouldn't be as difficult as Dick Barton supposed to establish his identity in the face of cremation.

The accident had happened in Las Vegas. There must have been hospital attention. Somebody had made the false finger joint. I'd take the train tonight and go to Las Vegas.

Maroni would think I had cold feet and was going back to New York. I was pretty sure a watch was being kept on me, and when I phoned the desk and asked them to get me a reservation on the Union Pacific train that evening for Chicago, the news would reach the ears of my enemies.

Probably Dick would go with me. I hoped he wouldn't because I hadn't done anything on my own initiative since I had arrived in Los Angeles.

A man with a false top to his left hand little finger. How could they have chosen him?

Well, if I knew Steve as well as I thought I did, he had started for Santa Barbara immediately upon his arrival in Los Angeles. He had evaded those who were laying in wait for him in some manner; unconscious that there was a plot against him; and had arrived at the Steele estate unexpectedly. Those around his grandfather had nabbed him and locked him up. I was sure, now, that it was Steve I had seen at the barred window, it was no hallucination. A man with a missing finger! Oh, they had had to work in a hurry.

The afternoon dragged and it came to be a quarter of five and Dick hadn't shown up. Ah, the phone! I leaped to it but it wasn't Dick, it was Clarice. She was sobbing into the phone. Her speech was so thick that at first I couldn't understand her. I couldn't believe my ears.

Richard Barton has been shot on the steps of the Hall of Justice as he was leaving. A man had fired at him from a closed car and made his getaway. No, he wasn't dead but he was in the emergency hospital. It was thought he would live.

"Can I do anything, Clarice?" I asked excitedly.

"Watch your step. While the police think it was somebody who had a grudge against Dick, it might be connected with your matter."

"Can I see you? Take you to dinner, maybe?"

"No, no, I'm staying at the hospital."

"I'll come right over."

"No, they won't let you see him. I don't want to see anybody. Tonight, maybe—"

"Clarice, I've got to go out of town

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tonight—something has come up, I can't tell you on the phone—"

Clarice laughed scornfully and wildly. "So you're going to run for it. That's what you turned out to be—well, run, rabbit, run!"

"Dick would want me to do this. A tremendous piece of evidence—"

"Bah!" exclaimed the grief crazy girl and hung up on me.

I walked the floor again. I didn't want Clarice to think I was a coward, but, if they were listening in on my line—what could I do?

Of course Maroni was responsible for the shooting of Dick Barton. He didn't think I could accomplish anything by myself but Barton was a power in the city—a brilliant lawyer and a man who couldn't be influenced in any way. If he had been killed—but he wasn't—he would live though it might be weeks before he would be up and around. I was on my own.

I GRABBED my hat, rushed down to the lobby and told a taxi to take me to the Emergency Hospital. It was only five or six minutes distant. I told the taxi to wait and ran up the steps. Sitting on a bench in the hall was Clarice. She was white as a ghost and looking straight ahead of her and seeing nothing. She wasn't weeping, but obviously she was suffering tortures.

I touched her on the shoulder. She started violently, saw me and smiled.

"I'm sorry, Tim," she said gently. "I know you're not like that, but you can imagine the state I'm in. I can't think, I'm just sitting here waiting—oh, Doctor—" She rushed toward a white coated physician who had come down the stairs.

"There, now, Miss Barton," he said kindly. "Brace up. It's not even as bad as we thought. We removed the bullet. It hadn't hit anything vital—not much more than a flesh wound—he's going to be all right."

"Oh, thank God," she murmured.

"I promise you that in two weeks he'll be fit as a fiddle. He's sleeping now. He'll wake up conscious—a little weak, of course, but all he will need is rest."

She tossed her head. "If you say two weeks, that means a week. You don't know the vitality that boy has, Doctor Marks. Why I'm not worried a bit now, I feel fine—" She grasped his arm. "You're telling me the truth?"

"I certainly am."

She whisked over to where I stood. The change in the girl was tremendous. She was absolutely radiant. Suddenly she threw her arms around my neck and kissed me hard. I was flabbergasted and thrilled, but I knew it was nothing but the exuberance of her relief following her horrible apprehension.

"Let's go," she said. "I have to have a cocktail. Oh, Tim, isn't it wonderful!"

She had me out of the place and down the steps. I helped her into my taxi.

"Why have you got to leave town?" she demanded. "I'm so happy I could dance tonight—with a good partner."

"With your brother in the hospital?"

"But he's going to be all right. Tim, we're insane about each other. When I heard the news—I'd have killed myself if he had died."

"I think you would," I said soberly. "You are the two most remarkable people I ever met. Since we know he's not in danger, I'm taking the train for Las Vegas tonight."

"Oh, I thought—I was afraid you might be going all the way east."

"When we get to the hotel I'll tell you—"

She called to the taxi driver. "Stop here!"

"A nice little cocktail bar with no-

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body ever in it," she said. "I think the walls have ears at your hotel."

We sat down and I told her what I had learned from the bellboy. She became excited.

"Of course, you and I were right all the time and Dick was wrong. Won't we rub it into him for that!"

"I can't understand how they could overlook the missing finger joint in the matter of identification."

"THE whole business was covered up. Money can do anything in this town. Why, if we can find out in Las Vegas the name of this crippled man, trace him here, get his pictures—probably they're in the rogues' gallery—we'll break this conspiracy wide open. And we'll find out who shot Dick."

"I can tell you what I think." I told her of the visit of Lafe Morton whom I had recognized as the New York gangster Giovanni Maroni, his proposition and his threats. "I'm positive that he is responsible for the attack on Dick. He figured I'll be easy to take care of but, with Dick Barton working with me—"

"There are scores of people in this town who would cheerfully murder Dick," she said gravely. "But the shooting at this particular moment looks as if it was inspired by this Maroni. We'll do something about him when Dick gets on his feet. Now we'll have dinner at San Bernardino—"

"What?"

"You have to go to Las Vegas—but not by train. I'll drive you up. We'll start right away."

"You won't—"

"After your defiance of Maroni, he won't believe you're turning tail. We'll have men on the train with you. Tim Cody, your life is in terrible danger. You've found out enough already to scare them silly. And it occurred to me, today, that if you saw Steve at that window, when the lightning flash came, so did the men you were fighting with. And they probably guess that it was you and I and Dick who broke into the grounds of the Steele estate. Having gone to all that trouble to prove that Steve is dead, they'll have to get rid of you because you know he is alive."

"In that case you mustn't risk being with me."

Her pretty face twisted with emotion. "I've go tto do something," she pleaded. "Tim, I'll go crazy tonight at home thinking about Dick in the hospital.

"We'll be back in Los Angeles tomorrow afternoon. I can hit a hundred all the way across the desert. You've got to let me go."

"After all, they don't know where we're going—probably there is no risk," I said slowly.

She jumped up. "Come on. Don't go back to the hotel. I'll get you one of Dick's coats and a six-shooter. We'll taxi to my house and start from there."

"Clarice, you're a girl—we'll be gone all night—"

"I'm a girl and you're an old woman," she snapped. "What do I care for gossip?"

I didn't protest any more. First I had been led round by the nose by Dick Barton and, now that he was flat on his back, I was being led round by the nose by his amazing little sister. But I sort of liked it.

She insisted that it would be cold in the desert at night and loaned me an English ulster of Dick's. It was comfortable to feel a gun in my pocket. I hadn't carried one since I turned in my police revolver when they took my shield. She took a heavy fur coat herself and within five minutes after arriv-

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ing at her house we started on our journey.

SHE had to go at a reasonable rate of speed for the first half hour because we were passing through thickly settled districts, so we had a chance to talk.

"It seems to me that the first thing to do is to get Steve out of their hands, and prove the identity of the other man afterwards," she said.

"Right, but where is he? When a detective goes at a case he works the way a person does at a tough knot. He looks for a loose end and starts there."

"That sounds intelligent."

"When this job was planned, they didn't know that I existed and probably didn't know that Steve had become engaged to Rhoda Robinson. And they couldn't be expected to guess he would leave us his mother's estate or that his lawyer would advance me cash. When somebody dies and leaves you money, you're usually content to assume that he is dead and spend the money."

"Yes, but I don't see—"

"Steve had been abroad for years. Just what kind of fellow he had turned into Patterson didn't think anybody knew. There was nobody in Los Angeles who was acquainted with Steve, nobody who knew his habits, so they built up the two days' toot and put a climax to it with the murder out on Central Avenue. Well, they were too smart. If he had been killed by accident or shot down in the street or anything like that, Rhoda and I would have felt badly, but wouldn't have been suspicious."

"But isn't there danger that they'll kill Steve now that they know we suspect their plot?"

"Maybe—but first they'll try to do something about me. If they can get rid of me, I don't think they'll worry about Rhoda."

"And they've already tried to eliminate Dick. I wonder if they will plan anything for me," she said with a brave laugh.

"I'd feel a lot better if I were making this trip alone," I told her. "If anything happened to you—"

"You'd have nothing about which to reproach yourself. I am in this with my eyes open. I enjoy taking risks."

We had dinner in the dining room at the railroad station at San Bernardino and in half an hour we were climbing the mountains. I put on the overcoat for it was getting cold already. When we hit the desert beyond the San Bernardino mountains, Clarice really began to drive. If she had taken my breath away on the trip to Santa Barbara, it's a wonder I didn't die of fright as she tore across the desert. I shut my eyes so I couldn't see the speedometer needle climb to a hundred miles an hour.

Beyond Barstow it grew bitter cold. The road was straight as an arrow and we simply flew over it. We didn't talk any more. Going too fast. I sat there and watched her and thought how beautiful she was and what a pal she was and hoped nothing would happen to her no matter what happened to me.

At three in the morning, nine hours from Los Angeles, we drove into a sleeping town she said was Las Vegas. We stopped in front of a nice looking hotel and heaved a deep sigh.

"We'll sleep until eight-thirty," she said. "You can visit the hospital, I think there's only one, and make your inquiries. We ought to start back about nine-thirty if possible. I want to get home by six o'clock. I'll put in a call to the hospital in Los Angeles right away. Though I'm sure Dick is sleeping like a baby."

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She did—and he was. We rented a couple of rooms and I left a call for eight thirty. I wasn't going to wake Clarice but she was in the dining room ahead of me looking as fresh as if she hadn't driven nearly four hundred miles in eight hours' running time.

CHAPTER XI

"Don't Let Him Die Twice!"

I FELT groggy myself but she claimed she felt wonderful. I left her and went to the hospital and asked for the head surgeon. I told him I was a New York detective looking for a fellow whose name I didn't know who was supposed to have had part of the little finger of his left hand shot off in this town a couple of years back.

Luck was with me. "Why I remember him," said the doctor. "I made the amputation. I can find his name in the files. He drifted into town and got into a stud game at the 'Stag.'

"Boulder Dam had just got going and there were a lot of rough lads in the gambling houses. This was a gentlemanly bird, an eastern card sharp. His specialty was what they call 'bottom dealing' which means he dealt you a card from the bottom of the pack when you thought it was coming off the top. He took three or four fellows for their roll, but the proprietor of the house got onto him, came up behind and caught him in the act. While a couple of the boys held him, the boss drew his gun and blew off the end of the little finger of the left hand. It was considered very amusing at the time."

"Why?"

"Because it's the little finger of the left hand that does the trick. He held the pack in his left, pushed out the card so that the fingers of the right hand could easily get it. Well, it probably ended that crook's career. I had to amputate the first two joints."

"Happen to remember what he looked like?"

"Why no, except that he was tall and thin and wore spectacles. Wait. I'll get his name."

He came back in a few minutes. "His name was Ambrose J. Adamson and he gave his home as St. Louis. What's he been up to?"

"Forgery," I said at random. "The fingers of his right hand are still okay."

I went back to the hotel in high fettle.

Thanks to a chance remark by the bellboy, I knew that the man identified as Stephen Steele at the Los Angeles Morgue was Ambrose J. Adamson of St. Louis. Of course, he hadn't had the wax finger and the broad gold band made in Las Vegas; no skilled workmen in that line to be found in a little place like that. And I didn't over-estimate the importance of my discovery. It simply meant that we were making progress since we knew that Steve was alive and Adamson had been cremated in his place.

All the way back to Los Angeles, Clarice and I speculated over the motive but we didn't come within a thousand miles of it. A lot of things had to happen before we got a faint glimmering of the plot which John Bankerman, head of the Federal Department of Justice, afterwards said was the most ingenious and most skillfully managed conspiracy of the century.

We congratulated ourselves upon having put something over on Maroni and his followers. It would have been pie for him to follow us and catch us in the middle of the desert. No doubt he had been watching the eight o'clock train last night and probably had been peeved when I didn't put in an appearance at the station.

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About six o'clock we drew up in front of the hospital in Los Angeles and entered and asked anxiously regarding Dick's condition. He was doing as well as could be expected but, as yet, could see nobody, not even his sister.

"I'll drop you at the Biltmore," said Clarice as we got into the car once more. "Call me first thing in the morning and for heaven's sake be careful—don't go out tonight—"

"I'm going right to bed. I'm shell shocked from the way you drove."

She laughed gaily. "I could go dancing—if some nice man invited me. I get a tremendous kick out of a long fast trip," she said.

"Some other night I may invite you —I'm half asleep now."

I went into the lobby and ceased to feel sleepy. Standing at the desk was none other than Mr. Patterson of the Steele Company. He was registering. Maroni, alias Morton, was with him, and a couple of men I didn't know. Probably they were local officials of the company.

I WENT into the elevator, up to my room, undressed and fell into bed. I was careful to lock my door. So my presence out there had drawn the big mogul from New York. It meant I had him terrified, but exactly what he was frightened about I couldn't guess.

In the morning papers the arrival of Mr. Patterson, President of the Steele Motor Company, was announced. It seemed that his physician had ordered him to take a few weeks' rest, so he had taken advantage of the opportunity to pay his respects to the esteemed President of the Board, Mr. Jonathan Steele, and discuss plans for the coming year. He expected to leave for Palm Springs in the afternoon. There followed the usual complimentary stuff about the climate and the twaddle distinguished visitors always spill to reporters.

I put in a call to the hospital and inquired about Dick Barton. They said he was doing even better than could be expected, but couldn't see anybody or talk on the phone for a day or two. After that I ordered ham and eggs and coffee sent up to the room and wondered if it was too early to call up Clarice. The breakfast came up while I was still wondering and then the same bellboy who had found the missing finger of Mr. Adamson arrived with a note.

"I'm to wait for an answer," he said.

I opened the letter which was on hotel stationery. This was what it said:

Dear Mr. Cody,

I should like very much to talk to you for a few minutes at your convenience this morning. I'm sure you will find it worth your while to call at Suite 412.

Roscoe Patterson.

I went to my desk and wrote an answer and got a lot of pleasure out of what I wrote:

Dear Mr. Patterson,

As it seems to be your idea to talk with me, suppose you come to my room because of the way I was treated the last time I talked to you. And kindly don't bring Mr. Lafe Morton with you.

Timothy Cody.

"That will hold the old shark," I said aloud, and the bellboy guffawed.

"Want me to tell him that?" he asked. I tossed him half a dollar.

"Use your own judgment," I said with a grin, "but you'll probably lose a tip if you tell him."

Five minutes later my phone rang.

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"Mr. Patterson is on his way up," the operator reported.

I decided that I'd be discovered finishing a hearty breakfast. I was looking forward to this interview. While something was due to drop on me if I didn't look out, I'd forced the great Mr. Patterson to call on me in my room.

"Come in," I called when he knocked on the door. I'd seen Patterson sitting at his desk, being president of one of the greatest corporations in America. I'd seen him laying down the law and bristling with rage. Well, the gentleman who came in was as mild as a May morning. He had a gardenia in the buttonhole of an almost purple blazer and white flannel trousers with a brown stripe in them and his ugly mug was spread in what he thought was an ingratiating smile.

I continued to sit at the table. "Have a chair," I said indifferently and drank what was left of the coffee in my cup.

I saw his eyes shine angrily, but he kept the smile and he took a chair. "You have a hearty appetite, I see, Mr. Cody," he said smoothly. "I'm on a diet. It's wonderful to have youth."

"Thanks. What's on your mind, Mr. Patterson?"

"Ahem. First I must state that I was under a great misapprehension about Miss Robinson. I had been informed she was an adventuress. I realize now that she is a worthy young woman and actually was the fiancée of the late Stephen Steele."

"She was," I said shortly.

"And, of course, I didn't know that you were so intimate with him that he had named you in his will. I assumed you were an ordinary private detective."

"Let's pass that. Your personal representative, Mr. Morton, told me the same thing."

HE rubbed his hands together and smiled cordially. "I'm glad. I was afraid that Mr. Morton had not performed his mission very well, since you specified that you did not wish to see him."

"Well, now, Mr. Patterson, I happened to know that his real name was Maroni and that he was one of the meanest gangsters in New York. I don't suppose you've found that out. You seem to be late finding things out."

"You must be mistaken," he said loudly. "I engaged him upon fine recommendations. However, I'll have him investigated immediately."

"Mr. Maroni threatened my life, Mr. Patterson. I don't suppose you wanted him to do that."

"Certainly not," he exclaimed, apparently shocked. "Why should he threaten your life?"

"Because I refused to go back to New York. I happen to like it out here, Mr. Patterson."

"Surely you have been here long enough to learn that young Steele was murdered as a result of a quarrel in a low dive. As his beneficiary, you must share his grandfather's desire that further scandal should be suppressed."

"I don't expect to be Steve's beneficiary, Mr. Patterson," I tossed at him. "I don't think Steve is dead, Mr. Patterson."

"You must be crazy," he cried excitedly. "You ought to be confined in some institution. I'm wasting my time talking to you."

"My attorney, Richard Barton, doesn't think I'm crazy. Probably that's why he was shot yesterday. You

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may be interested to know it was only a flesh wound and he'll be back on the job in a few days."

"I don't know the man and I'm not in any way interested," he said angrily. "And I don't like your manner, young man. You seem to be insinuating—"

"An attempt was made to have me arrested on a trumped-up charge in New York, somebody tried to shoot me in Chicago and Joe Maroni told me, yesterday, I wouldn't live long if I didn't take fifty grand from you and go back to New York, Mr. Patterson. Now, you're the only person I ever had trouble with in my life." I grinned at him in a nasty manner. His face was as red as a beet.

"I came here, having learned you were Steele's beneficiary, in the hope you would join with his other relatives and friends in letting him rest in peace," he said pompously. "I'm wasting my time."

"Okay, Mr. Patterson," I said indifferently. He rose, took a couple of steps toward the door and turned around. He was wearing the smile again.

"After all," he said, "nothing would please me better, nothing would so delight Jonathan Steele than to learn that the people who had identified the body as Stephen Steele's were mistaken. I had been looking forward to the day when an able young man would take over the great business founded by Jonathan Steele. I anticipated working with him in perfect harmony. I was shocked by his death and terribly grieved by the manner of it. I would like very much to know why you think he is alive."

I looked him squarely in the eye. For a second, I lost my head talking to this man. He irritated me so I couldn't control myself. I had no intention of telling him anything. I was going to keep my mouth shut and hear what he had to say. But the smile had turned into a sneer.

"Because I've seen him," I blurted out.

The man's eyes almost popped out of his head. His arms lifted in an expression which might have been alarm or just astonishment.

"You've seen him," he mumbled.

"And so have others," I shouted. "You've taken some awful chances, Patterson, but you take my advice. Don't let Steve Steele die twice."

"What — what do you mean?" he gasped. His lips were bloodless and they were usually dark red like frankfurters.

"Because you may not be able to cook things up so neatly the second time. That's all I've got to say, Mr. Patterson—now."

He pulled himself together. "You're stark mad, mad! It was obvious that day in my office. Your conduct since confirms it and this weirdly preposterous statement—"

"Don't let him die twice," I repeated, my eyes glued to his.

The President of the great Jonathan Steele Corporation grabbed the door knob and let himself out into the hall. And as soon as he was gone I could have kicked myself for being a damned fool. I knew what Dick Barton would have told me. It was a wonder I hadn't babbled about the man with the missing little finger. If he had stuck around I might have done that. Knowing that he had a first class murderer in his pay, knowing what had happened to Dick and what had almost happened to myself in Chicago, I had practically dared him to have me rubbed out.

I threw myself on the bed and kept

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calling myself names. But after a while I saw things from another angle.

I'd scared Mr. Roscoe Patterson. He'd lost his color and his eyes as he went out were terrified.

And that meant that Steve was alive; that he knew it; he knew where he was.

And maybe my crazy outburst had saved Steve Steele's life. Dick Barton could see why it might be to Patterson's interests to have Steve put out of the way, but not how it could benefit him to keep him a prisoner.

CHAPTER XII

Tim Finds Himself Cornered

THERE was no doubt that a trap for Steve had been laid in Los Angeles and in some mysterious way Steve had escaped it. They had gone through with the original plan but used another victim. That was because he had walked into their clutches at Santa Barbara. The Secretary had locked him up in his grandfather's house. They were holding him until another ingenious method could be devised to eliminate him with no possible chance of a come-back on this Secretary or Patterson.

And Patterson was yellow — with Tim Cody swearing he had seen Steve he wouldn't dare to do anything about Steve until something had been done about Tim Cody. I'd have to take care of myself for Steve's sake as well as my own. Well, I was no baby. I'd take care of myself.

No doubt Patterson had come to my room with the idea of increasing the size of the bribe.

I was so far away from the real motive that it was comical, but I had dug in quite a distance considering the few days I'd been on the job.

Here I was in the same hotel with a man whose plans I was blocking and who had plenty of tools who would go the limit. My next move should be to move.

I started in to pack my two suitcases. In ten minutes I walked out of there, took the elevator to the lobby, crossed to the cashier's desk and paid my bill. As I turned I saw Maroni sitting in a big chair across the lobby. His eyes were fixed on me and there was a half grin on his face. Of course I'd be followed.

I went outside and took a taxi to the railroad station. There was a lot of traffic on Hill Street and I couldn't be sure whether another taxi was following me, but I took it for granted. At the railroad station, I checked my bags and went out front again, my eyes wide open for a shadow. I saw nobody who looked as if my business was his business, but I decided to run no risk.

I went into a telephone booth and called up Clarice. She answered the phone herself.

"I was just going to call you," she said. "I've seen Dick. He's conscious and feeling well considering. He sent you word to stick close to your room, and not to talk to anybody except me. He says he'll be around in a week and we won't lose anything by inaction."

"The warning came too late," I said sheepishly. "I told Patterson, who's in town, and called on me this morning, enough to cause him to set his dogs on me. After he left, I got wise and checked out. I'm at the railroad station. I know my taxi has been trailed. Any taxi I take will be followed. I hate to ask you to take any chances that I won't. I'll manage this myself."

"Don't be a fool," she snapped.

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"They know I was with you and Dick at the Santa Barbara. I'm taking no chance. What do you want me to do?"

"I remember the way you drive. If you'll pick me up in your car and start out of town, I don't think any taxi can follow us far."

She laughed gaily. "Of course not. I'll get the car. It's having the carburetor fixed at a garage near here, but I'll meet you anywhere you say in half an hour."

"All right. On the corner of Adams Street—this side of your house. I'll take a taxi and I'll be waiting."

I grinned as I thought of my shadows trying to keep up with a girl who ran through signals with impunity and did a hundred miles an hour on the open road. I went out front again and picked up a taxi and gave the fellow the address. I leaned back on the cushions complacently. The idea would be to shoot out fifteen or twenty miles, come back some other road and get into some quiet little apartment. Clarice would know of a place.

As soon as it reached the main business thoroughfares, the taxi began to creep and crawl. On account of the traffic signals not being synchronized, down town Los Angeles is the hardest city in the world in which to make time. At every short block we were stopped for twenty seconds to a minute. And, at one of these stops, the door of the car was pulled open and in jumped a dark stranger. I reached for the gun Clarice had loaned me, but this fellow had an automatic against my side before I could draw.

"You and me are going places," he said. "Talk to me nice and pleasant."

"How are you, Mike," I said loudly. "Sure, glad to give you a lift."

"You can drop me at the corner of Main Street and Fourteenth. Much obliged, old man."

"What's the idea?" I asked in a low tone.

"A feller wants to see you, Cody," he said through clenched teeth.

"Okay." I leaned back on the cushions.

"I know who you mean," I said. "He and I can do business."

"Yeh. People always do business with this guy."

"Chicago?"

"Shut up," he growled. I had hit it, though. A Chicago gangster. There's quite a migration of Chicago gunmen to Los Angeles in the winter time.

I kept my eyes open. Something might happen to give me a break. The car kept stopping in traffic. My friend got his weapon under my coat so the chauffeur couldn't see it if he leaned back. I'd made a fool of myself again.

I had been watchful on the way to the station. Having made the arrangement with Clarice, I had relaxed. I hadn't really expected to be bumped off in Los Angeles—not with Patterson in town and knowing that Dick Barton was alive and dangerous. It proved it wasn't wise to assume anything.

The address given the chauffeur turned out to be a shabby looking hotel. I paid off the chauffeur with my pal leaning against me familiarly and instead of going in through the lobby we went through a side door and up a flight of stairs. We walked down the hall and stopped before a door. Keeping me covered, he knocked three times, two short raps, one hard one. The door opened.

It was a large bare room. Two men were playing cards at a table by the

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window. A third had admitted us and stepped up behind me. They grinned at my captor.

"Got him, eh?"

"Yep."

"Sure it's him?"

"You bet. Phone the boss, will you?"

There was a nickel in the slot telephone in the room. He dialed a number and called a room number.

"Joe?" he asked. "Danny. That guy you wanted to see just came in."

THE fellow behind me had drawn the revolver from my hip pocket. He tossed it on the bed. My friend felt for a shoulder holster, thrust his hand into my right hand trousers pocket and drew out my wad —all the money I had in the world.

"Four and a half grand, nearly," he exclaimed joyfully as he counted it. The quartet exchanged glances.

"Aw, Maroni will grab most of it," said one of them sorrowfully. "Go over and lay on the bed, guy," he told me. "Start something and see what happens."

I went over and lay down on the bed. This was the worst fix I had ever been in. If Maroni gave the word, any one of the four would empty a gun into me regardless of consequences. Outside was the racket of the city. Shots would draw police and collect a crowd. It was midday; none of those things would bother them. They'd leave me a bleeding corpse, rush out of the hotel, fight their way through a mob and in all probability escape.

In appearance they were nondescripts—thousands like them in every big city. Once away from the scene of their crime, it's almost impossible to find and identify them. I knew what a job it was to catch a New York gunman even with his fingerprints.

They hadn't even bothered to tie me up. They would enjoy filling me full of holes, if I started anything. I knew Dick Barton would not hesitate to hit out, if he landed in a fix like this, but I knew gunmen better than he did, even if he had been a district attorney. I lay quiet waiting for Maroni.

He came in after about ten minutes. He had a dark overcoat with the collar turned up and his blue felt hat was pulled down over his eyes. Both his hands were thrust deep in his pockets. He came in, looked at me without expression and, out of the side of his mouth, told the quartet to wait outside in the hall.

"Got you easy enough," he sneered when we were alone.

"Well?"

"Tried to get me in wrong with the boss, eh?"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Figured we wouldn't do anything in this town."

"You don't dare do anything. Ask Patterson. He knows his book. He'll tell you to turn me loose."

He pulled up a chair at a safe distance from the bed, still keeping his hands in his pockets.

"You ought to have taken that fifty grand," he remarked. "Too late, now."

"I get the heat, do I?"

If Tim had not lost his temper with Patterson he might have avoided being cornered by this gang of hoods. But Tim realized that he had made a big mistake—and knew too well the severe penalty that went with it. Will he be able to extricate himself from this jam—as he has in the past? In the next gripping installment Tim is taken for a ride, but not the kind of a ride you might expect—it was even a surprise to Tim!

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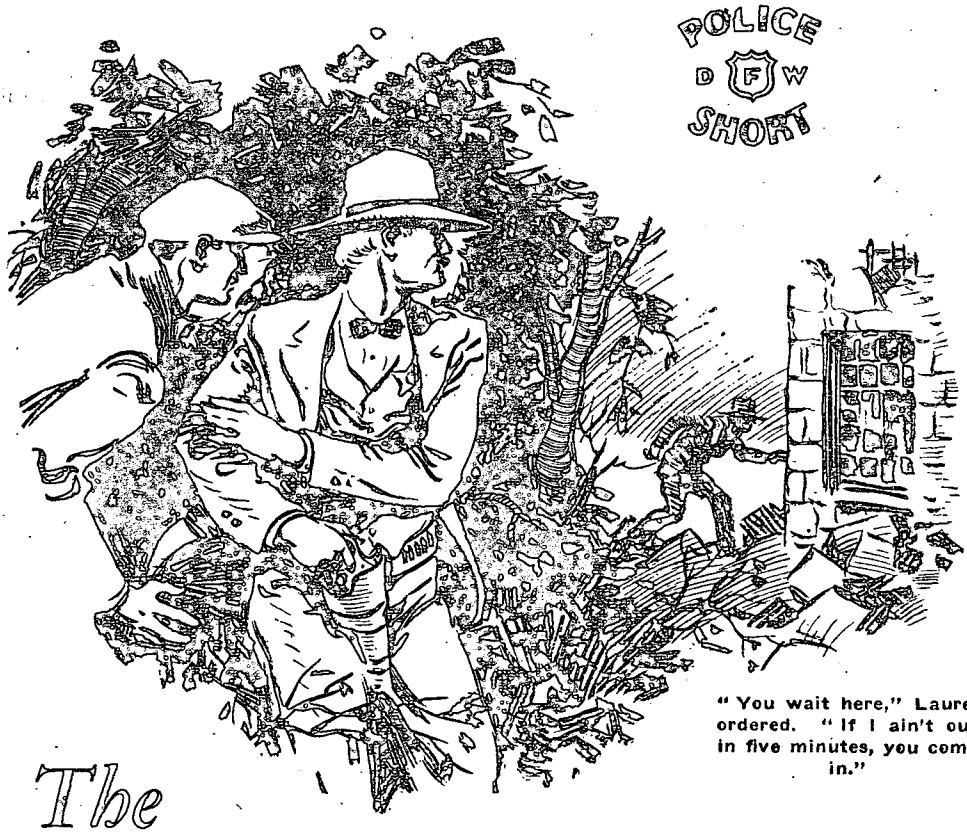

"You wait here," Laurel ordered. "If I ain't out in five minutes, you come in."

The Fellow Who Killed Felix

By
Thomas W. Duncan

The Evidence Pointed to Cliff Barton as the Murderer. But Old Jim Laurel, Veteran Sheriff at Broken Ax, Found It All Added to: Frame-Up!

SOMEONE was running fast through the windy March darkness.

Old Jim Laurel, sheriff at Broken Ax, cocked his head and squinted into the shadows blackening the path that steeply zig-zagged up the river bluff.

The footsteps sounded from above. Anyone who would run down this path at night was evidently more afraid of something at the top than he was of broken bones.

Sheriff Laurel fingered his flashlight. As the footsteps crashed near, he snapped it on. "Hey, there!" he shouted.

The face that he saw was drained of blood. It belonged to young Cliff Barton.

"Hey, Cliff—" Laurel yelled, but at that instant a straight-arm blow struck his shoulder and knocked him

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into a clump of scraggly bushes at the side of the trail.

"You young— Hey—stop!" Laurel bawled, scrambling to his feet.

But already the runner was far down the path.

Laurel scowled into the chasm below, where, to the south, the lights of Broken Ax flickered, and where, to the northeast, a government channel light reflected itself in the wind-chopped water of the Mississippi river.

"Ain't like Cliff to get scared," Laurel muttered. Taking out his .45, he swung up the path. If terror waited, he guessed his gun would make it less terrible. His .45 had that habit.

Laurel was on his way to spend the evening with Felix Camp, the meanest man in the county. They would not talk; they would sit with a checker board between them.

"I'd spend an hour with the devil himself," Laurel always said, "if old Nick liked checkers."

Reaching the bluff's crest, Laurel sent his flashlight's beam scouring the wind-tossed bushes. He saw nothing suspicious. Then he trudged on toward Felix Camp's house.

A big Victorian structure, its weathered turrets loomed bleakly against the windy stars. Years ago, Camp had sold his bank and retired here to make life miserable for his niece, Mary. She had left him recently to attend business school in Port Fergus.

"Cliff might not have been scared—might have been mad," Laurel surmised, putting away his gun.

Cliff Barton and Mary Camp were in love, but old Felix forbade their going together, ostensibly because Cliff ran a garage instead of a bank.

"Felix is a mean old fool," Laurel thought, "but he sure knows checkers."

Creaking open the gate, he heard the evergreen windbreak moaning, and the bang-banging of an unlatched blind. Up here on the roof of the world, the gale whistled more shrilly than down in the village.

Cracks of light glimmered through the living room blinds, but when Laurel twisted the door bell there was no response. Peal after peal echoed through the house. Finally, he opened the door, stepped into the chill vestibule, and called: "Felix."

No reply. He opened the living room door. There was a cold, marble grate, and crayon portraits on the brown walls. But these did not interest Sheriff Jim Laurel.

What did interest him was Felix Camp, lying on the threadbare carpet. His oyster-gray face was grayer than usual, and his eyes were glassy. A crimson blotch had stained the left side of his vest. He was not breathing.

WHILE seventy long seconds ticked off into eternity, Jim Laurel stood looking at Felix Camp.

The dead man's right fingers still held a cigar; in life, he had been an inveterate smoker. The stub was cold, as if death had touched it, too.

"Lucky that went out," Laurel murmured. "Might have set the house afire."

On the right hand also, a big diamond ring sparkled. Laurel wished that ring were not there. He wished this had been robbery and murder, instead of just murder. For Cliff Barton would not steal, but he might kill, if he were angry enough. Laurel liked Cliff Barton.

Suddenly, a new sound cut through

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the mournful wind—the wall telephone.

"Hello!" Laurel said.

It was Todd Connor, a deputy. "Cliff Barton just came in here, all out of breath," the receiver chattered. "He said Felix Camp had been murdered."

"He's right about that. Did he say whether he'd done it?"

"He says he didn't."

"Uh!"

"Shall I hold him here?"

"No," Laurel said, "don't hold him there. Bring him up here. I've got some more lookin' round to do, and I'd like to ask him some things."

Laurel clicked up the receiver.

Staring down once more at the dead man, he noted, beneath the left wrist, a handkerchief. It was large and crisply laundered. Usually, Felix Camp wore such a handkerchief in the breast pocket of his coat, but now that pocket was empty. Laurel picked it up.

The linen was snowy white except for an irregular brown spot, about three-quarters of an inch in diameter, that stained the cloth a little to the left of its center. Dying, Camp had evidently plucked the handkerchief from his pocket—but why?

Laurel's blunt thumb scratched his ragged jaw. The brown spot might have been made by a laundry iron that was too hot.

Then, remembering something else, he stuffed the handkerchief into his pocket and leaned over Camp. He slid his hand into the inner pocket of the dead man's coat. The pocket was empty.

Laurel had known Camp for thirty years; the man always carried, in that inner pocket, a leather wallet. And in the wallet he kept a considerable amount of money—around $200. Now it was gone.

Stolen? But if so, why hadn't the diamond been stolen, also?

Laurel circled about the room, knitting his brows, thumbing his jaw. Finally, he sat in a rocker, his gaze on the carpet. Then, all at once, he rose, walked to the oak table in the center of the room, and knelt. His big paw roamed beneath the table and dragged out what his eyes had spied.

It was a knife. Moreover, it was of a particular variety—an oversize pocket-knife, known in Broken Ax as a "toad stabber."

A picture of a Mississippi steamboat was inlaid on one side of the haft; on the other, a picture of two steamboats racing. The long blade was open, and stained red.

There was but one knife like that in town; it had long been the envy of small boys; loafers had tried to buy it. It belonged to Cliff Barton.

II

THE gate creaked; feet thumped the porch; the door opened.

"I phoned Doc Kellogg," Deputy Todd Connor said. "He was out on a call, but he'll come as soon as he gets back."

Doc Kellogg was the coroner.

Laurel nodded, looked over the four men.

"I didn't expect so many of you," he said. "No— Keep away from that corpse. I'll do all the examinin' till Doc Kellogg gets here. Sit down."

They found chairs: Connor, Cliff Barton, Bill Drury, Ed Shoemaker.

Shoemaker and Drury were about sixty years old. Shoemaker had a long, lean body, the spinal cord topped by a bald head, his arms tipped by long, lean fingers. When he forgot to wear

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his false teeth, as was the case tonight, his mouth was sunken, he had gone broke running a grocery.

Bill Drury, a retired farmer, had a mustache that was clipped to a frosty shadow below his Roman nose. He was smoking a thickly-caked pipe, very foul, and as they sat down Shoemaker turned to him and yapped, "I wish you'd stop that stink."

Drury puffed imperturbably.

"How come," Laurel asked, "that you two came up here? How'd you know about it?"

"We saw Cliff runnin' into the courthouse," Drury replied, "and we went in to see what it was all about."

"Well," Laurel grunted, "you know now. So just sit there and don't butt in."

Then he turned his gaze on Cliff Barton.

Barton, a husky chap in his early twenties, had a head of chestnut brown hair and brown eyes that met Laurel's without wavering.

"You got some explainin' to do," Laurel said. "Start talkin'."

"I had a letter from Mary today," he said. "She's in business school, you know, in Port Fergus. But she don't really want to be a stenographer. She went there to get away from old Felix—he was so mean. . . . What she and I really want—is to get married."

"That ain't no news," Laurel said.

"But her uncle is—or was—her guardian. She won't be eighteen till September. We want to get married in June. She wrote me and asked me to see old Felix and have a talk with him. So this evening I came up here. I was going to tell him that we'd be married, anyway, as soon as she comes of age, and tell him that he might as well let us get married in June. . . .

"Well, I rang the door bell, but he didn't answer. The door was unlocked and I walked in. And—and I saw him—on the floor—just the way he is—now—"

"It scared me. I turned and ran out of the house and down the bluff as fast as I could. I wanted to get to your office. . . . But as I was goin' down the bluff—somebody flashed a light in my face and hollered. . . . I stiff-armed him and ran on. I hardly knew what I was doin', I was so scared. I should have stopped and laid him out—because it might have been the person who—who murdered—Felix—"

"You derned fool!" Laurel snorted. "That was *me* you stiff-armed!"

Barton gulped.

Laurel asked, "How come you didn't telephone from here instead of runnin'?"

"Telephone?" Surprise crossed Barton's face, followed by a brief, sheepish grin. "Honest—I just didn't think of it. I didn't even think of it till you asked me just now. All I wanted was—to get away—"

"That story don't sound so convincin' to me," Bill Drury said.

"When the opinion of them who butted in without an invitation is wanted, I'll ask for it," Laurel said. Then he asked Barton, "Did you tell anyone about Mary's letter, or show it to anyone?"

"No, I didn't. I read it and didn't say a word to anyone. I carried it in my pocket all day."

Laurel scowled down at the middle finger of his right hand.

"Doggone these hang-nails," he muttered. "Lend me your knife, will you, Cliff?"

Cliff automatically put his hand in his pocket, then said, carelessly:

"Sorry. Don't have it with me."

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"Where'd you leave it?"

"Where? Why—I don't know—let me see. . . ."

Laurel stood up, walked nearer.

"Think hard, Cliff. Where did you leave your knife?"

FOR a moment, Barton corrugated his forehead, then snapped his fingers.

"I remember. I was workin' on Ted Sullivan's car this morning, and I was usin' it to scrape a spark plug. Then ten o'clock came. That meant the mail from Port Fergus was in and distributed. So I went to the post office and got Mary's letter. After I'd read it about six times, I started work on the car again, but I don't remember seein' the knife after that. . . . I remember when I was through workin' on it, I cleared all my tools off the running-board and fender, and I don't remember seein' the knife. . . ."

Laurel sighed, walked to the table, removed a newspaper that he had used to cover the knife.

"This is it, ain't it?"

Barton stared at it, then at Laurel, then once more at the blood-stained blade.

"Yes," he whispered, "that's it."

"Well, young fellow," Bill Drury said, "you might as well confess and save us taxpayers the expense of a long trial."

"An' you might as well button down your lip," Laurel rumbled, "and save your lungs a lot of breath." Then he asked Barton, "Cliff, do have money enough to get married?"

"I always said," was the answer, "that I wouldn't marry till I had five hundred in the bank. I've worked hard and saved. I've got five hundred and twenty dollars in the Rivermen's National. Why?"

"Because," Laurel said, remembering the missing wallet, "the fellow that killed Felix seemed to need money." He sighed. "One thing more."

He walked to the edge of the rug that covered most of the room's floor, knelt down, and sighted along it.

"In just a minute," he explained, "I'm goin' to ask you to walk along the rim of this rug while I watch. . . . But first I'm goin' to ask these others to walk along it, so I can compare their walkin' with yours."

"Are you goin' clear crazy?" Bill Drury asked.

"I might be," Laurel snapped, "it's been done before. . . . All right, Todd, you first."

Todd Connor stood up, crossed to where Laurel was sighting along the rug, and trod its rim.

"You next," Laurel told Ed Shoemaker.

Shoemaker obeyed.

"All right, now Bill."

Grumbling, Bill Drury walked along the rim.

"And now, Cliff. . . ."

After Cliff Barton had walked along the rug, Laurel stood up.

"That's all," he said.

Todd Connor's eyebrows lifted.

"I say that's all," Laurel repeated. "I'm through askin' questions. . . . I'll stay here with Felix's remains till Doc Kellogg gets here. Cliff and I. . . ."

"You mean—you don't want me to take Cliff back with me?" Connor asked.

"That's it. I'll bring him down when I come. I want him with me. Might think of another question. . . ."

Bill Drury asked, "Ain't you takin' a big risk—stayin' alone with a murderer?"

"Bill," Laurel replied, "sometimes

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I think the difference between you and most folks is that you and they was both born without any sense in your heads, but they got over it."

And he added: "Uh—Todd. Don't wait for me at the office. After I'm through here, I've got another job."

They all looked at him.

"Nothing much. Old Ira Matthews phoned me tonight that some kids stole a box o' his fishin' hooks, and some lines. I've kinda got a hunch they've hid them in the old brewery cave. When I was a kid, we used to play pirate and hide things there. Think I'll go over to that cave and see what I can find."

III

AS the front door clicked shut, Jim Laurel said "Come on," and crossed the living room.

"Where—" began Cliff Barton.

"Save your breath. You may need it."

Laurel led the way through the dining room, into the dark pantry and kitchen, and then into the wind that whistled beneath the roof of the back porch.

"We got to hurry," he flung over his shoulder as he plunged down the porch steps and half-trotted through Felix Camp's garden-lot.

"What are we going to do?"

"Catch the fellow that killed Felix."

"Then you don't think that I—"

"'Course not. But a jury might think so. We've got to act fast and catch him red-handed."

"Who is he?"

"I wouldn't know about that," Laurel muttered dryly. "I'm just a dumb hick sheriff. But I make the best of the few brains the Lord gave me. . . . And sometimes I fib, to get what I'm after."

Through the windy blackness, they made their way south, following cow paths that wandered through fields and timber. To the east, the village of Broken Ax, snuggling at the base of the bluffs, came abreast of them; they pressed on. Finally, they turned east, angling down into a ravine that led to a big stone building on the south edge of town. It loomed deserted, between the river and the bluffs.

"We'll stop here," Laurel whispered. "Use your eyes."

They stood behind a clump of bushes about a rod from the brewery door, waiting, watching. The wind came to them and sniffed at them and then rustled away through the bushes.

"When I was a kid," Laurel said, "they made beer there. Then the brewery went busted. . . . Us kids played in it, after it was deserted. There's a cave hollowed out in the bluff back of the vat-room, where they stored it in kegs and bottles. . . ."

Suddenly, Laurel stiffened. In the mass of blue shadows, and purple shadows, and indigo shadows, he made out a shadow that moved. . . . It came from the north, slipping furtively along, melting into the hulk of shadow that was the brewery.

"You wait here," Laurel ordered. "If I ain't out in five minutes, you come in."

And now Jim Laurel was himself a shadow, moving with infinite caution toward the brewery. The door long since had rotted off its hinges; as he stepped across the sill, into a room that was blacker than any shadow he had seen tonight, there came to his nostrils the odor of dust and decay. As he groped toward the vat-room, cobwebs broke across his face.

Years had fled since he had been here, but he remembered the floor-plan.

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He edged through the vat-room, making a conscious effort to breathe in such manner that air filled his lungs and leaked from his nose without sound. He extended a hand; the fingers contacted a dusty wall. He moved his fingers to the right; they found thin air. That would be the doorway into the cave.

His left hand closed over his flashlight; his right gripped his .45. Then he snapped down the flashlight button.

Through the doorway leapt the white beam, cutting a sharp swathe in the darkness, glistening on the beads of moisture that hung to the cavern wall, and bathing the figure of Ed Shoemaker. He was kneeling in the corner, but when the blinding light struck him he scrambled to his feet, his left fingers clamped about a long wallet he had dug from the sandy floor. On the wall behind him, his shadow wheeled enormous and grotesque as, with an incoherent cry, he leapt toward Jim Laurel.

"Ed! Stop where you are!" Laurel bellowed.

But Ed Shoemaker did not stop. With the swiftness of a cockroach his long legs carried him to the door; as Laurel pulled the trigger the other's fist knocked the sheriff's gunwrist; the shot went wild and the revolver went flying into the darkness. At the same instant, a fist caught Laurel's left cheek-bone, rocking him backward. Ed Shoemaker possessed an insane fury.

Laurel's arm shot out. He dropped the flashlight; by some miracle it did not shatter; it lay on the floor, casting weird rays upward.

Laurel encircled Shoemaker in a bear-hug; he drove his feet into the floor and rushed the other hard against the wall. Shoemaker tore loose his left arm and began whacking the wallet on the back of Laurel's head. Laurel hunched his shoulders, buried his head in Shoemaker's chest and butted him once more against the wall. Then suddenly, in the sharpness of unexpected pain, Laurel released the other. Shoemaker had kicked him in the right shin.

And Shoemaker was fleeing, that roach-run of his carrying him fast toward the door. Laurel leapt after him. But instantly he halted, dodged. Shoemaker's body blurted back into the room. He fell. His head cracked the floor hard.

"Huh," Laurel grunted to Cliff Barton. "You got a great straight-arm, boy. . . . Now we'll see how you are at carryin' loads. For we're going to have to carry Ed to jail."

"I'M kind of tuckered out," Jim Laurel told Cliff Barton, as they entered the sheriff's courthouse office after leaving Shoemaker where he belonged. "Guess I'm too old to get into fights."

Laurel sat down, squeaked back in his swivel chair.

"What I want to know," Barton exclaimed, "is, did you know—all along—that it was Shoemaker?"

"I was pretty sure. Especially after he walked straight along that rug."

"But—you said you wanted to see how I walked—"

"Sometimes I fib," Laurel sighed. "You know, it's a great advantage for a man to enforce the law among the fellows he's known all his life. It's hard for 'em to put anything over. For instance, I know that Shoemaker likes to loaf—and part of the time he loafs around your garage. He must have picked up your knife while you went to the post office this morning, and he thought it'd be a good way to kill Felix. Make folks suspicion you

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—everyone knows you and Felix didn't lose no love for each other."

But why—did Shoemaker want to kill Felix?"

"Money."

"But—"

"Felix always carried a wallet with plenty of money. Shoemaker knew that as well as I do."

"But to kill—for just a few hundred—"

Laurel nodded. "Shoemaker's been mighty nervous lately. I've noticed—his hands have been shaking, and he hasn't walked straight. . . . That meant he was out of cocaine—and didn't have the money to buy more—"

"Cocaine?"

"He's taken it for years. Not many know, but I do. That's my business, to know things. . . . It was his love for it that made him go broke in the grocery. . . . Well, Shoemaker was out of it. Way I figure, he had to have some. I think there's a peddler comes here from across the river—some day we'll catch him. So Shoemaker used your knife and killed Felix, and took his wallet and met the peddler. Then he was all right—he could walk straight.

"When I saw that, I made up the story about old Ira Matthews havin' some fishin' hooks stolen. Another fib. My brain had been workin', and I figured where Ed Shoemaker would be apt to hide what money he hadn't used, and I thought of the brewery cave. We used to hide things there when we was kids. So I said I was goin' there. I knew his fear would get to working and he'd go there after the wallet, so I wouldn't find it. . . . But the first hunch I had that it was Ed Shoemaker was the message that Felix left me."

"Message!"

Laurel took from his pocket the handkerchief that he had picked up by Felix's body.

"See that spot?"

"Yes."

"What made it?"

"It looks like—a hot iron—"

Laurel shook his head. "Nope. That was Felix's message. I've known Ed Shoemaker a long time. He takes cocaine, but he hates alcohol and tobacco. Especially tobacco. Remember how he complained to Bill Drury about that pipe?"

"Yes, I do now—"

"And Felix loved his cigars. In the old days, Shoemaker tried to get Felix to stop smokin'. Once he went so far as to take Felix's handkerchief out of his breast pocket and blow smoke through it. He said that was what it would do to Felix's lungs. All tommyrot, of course. It made Felix awful sore and they had a fight about it. Almost twenty years ago. I separated 'em. . . . Felix knew I'd remember that. So I figure that after Ed had stabbed him, Felix took a last puff on his cigar and blew smoke through his handkerchief—as a sort of message to me that Ed had been there. . . ."

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Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Police Patrolman	Special Agent (G-Man)
Police Detective	Secret Service Operative
Policewoman	Post Office Inspector
Fingerprint Expert	Customs Patrol
State Trooper	Immigration Patrol
Crime Prevention Investigator	Anti-Narcotic Agent
Probation Officer	Parole Investigator
Criminologist	Prison Keeper
Police Radio Expert	Internal Revenue Agent
	Alcohol Tax Agent

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.

A Social Status Test

AMONG the latest tests devised by personnel experts is one employed to determine the social standing of job applicants. Though we have not yet encountered it in any federal civil service examination, it has been employed in city civil service tests given to persons seeking positions as welfare and playground directors, and is in wide use in schools and summer camps to determine the social fitness of men and women seeking jobs as play directors, camp counselors and camp directors. For these jobs, employers seek persons who have the social qualifications, culture and background to equip them properly, to guide children entrusted to their care to a better understanding of clean sports, social graces and activities of everyday life.

In other words, the test is designed to determine whether the applicant is himself socially fit to train children. It has been frequently used to weed out persons who, while they may have attractive personalities, are unfit, socially, to serve as guides and counselors for the young people of today. The sample test reproduced below has been in wide use during the last three years. It is sometimes referred to as the test that "puts you in your place;" that is, it tells you where you belong socially. If you want to know how you stand in this respect, you may impose the test upon yourself.

THE SOCIAL STATUS TEST

Directions: The following classified advertisement in a newspaper catches your attention:

> CAMP COUNSELOR WANTED. Young men and women are desired of sound physical and mental health and good character. They must speak good English, be well-informed, refined and cultured and, above all things, must be qualified to set good examples for the children under their care as to everyday living, sports and etiquette. Yet they must be well-posted on the affairs of life.

You apply for the position advertised. A series of printed questions is given you. You are advised that every question must be answered. The test is divided into sections and the purpose of the test is not explained to you. For each correct answer, you will be given a mark of 10 points, and, since there are ten questions in each section, a perfect score would appear to be 100. Your fitness to fill the position ad-

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vertised will be judged by your mark for each section. Unanswered questions will mean a loss of 10 points.

SECTION ONE—Several possible answers are given to each question. Ring with a pencil the ONE answer you select. Write no explanations.

Q 1—The term "fade" is used in (a) boxing; (b) hockey; (c) dice throwing; (d) golf.

Q 2—The terms "show" and "place" are used in (a) theatricals; (b) target shooting; (c) horse race betting; (d) poker.

Q 3—A "pug" is a (a) prize-fighter; (b) person with a broken nose; (c) a thug; (d) a football coach.

Q 4—"Little Phoebe" is an expression used in (a) hunting birds; (b) throwing dice; (c) fishing; (d) music.

Q 5—A "mudder" is a (a) water bird; (b) race horse; (c) a football player; (d) laborer who works in tunnels.

Q 6—"Payoff" is an expression used in (a) banks; (b) betting; (c) scoring sports events; (d) settling an argument.

Q 7—"Scratched" is a sporting term used most frequently at (a) race tracks; (b) handball contests; (c) boxing matches; (d) card games.

Q 8—"Welsh" means most nearly to (a) cheat in a card game; (b) refuse to pay a bet; (c) fumble in a football game; (d) refuse to accept a judge's ruling.

Q 9—A bookie is one who (a) manages sporting events; (b) accepts bets; (c) is a bookworm; (d) hands out programs for a sporting contest.

Q 10—"House percentage" means most nearly (a) a charge made for the use of a gymnasium; (b) rake-off taken by a professional gambler; (c) dues paid to a club; (d) fee on a golf course.

SECTION TWO—Q 1—Puck is to hockey as ball is to (a) golf; (b) cube; (c) hole; (d) home run.

Q 2—Olympic games are held (a) every 4 years; (b) every other year; (c) once every decade; (d) when the AAU issues a call.

Q 3—A divot means (a) the tape used in foot-racing; (b) turf gouged from a golf course; (c) goal; (d) golf tee.

Q 4—The crawl is a (a) losing horse's pace; (b) a method of swimming; (c) end of a mile run; (d) relay race.

Q 5—Ringer means (a) prize fight referee; (b) a marked playing card; (c) an athlete competing under false colors; (d) an expert diver.

Q 6—The expression "it isn't Hoyle," means (a) to argue with the umpire; (b) not according to the rules; (c) a sarcastic way of referring to a football player; (d) throw out the referee.

Q 7—In bowling the highest possible score is (a) 500; (b) 400; (c) 300; (d) 250.

Q 8—In badminton the object in play is called (a) the ball; (b) the bird; (c) the fly; (d) the rubber.

Q 9—Unnecessary roughness is penalized in (a) all games played indoors; (b) in games where men and women are playing together; (c) football; (d) in wrestling.

Q 10—In any public contest, the players should always (a) try to satisfy the spectators; (b) play the game for the game's sake; (c) regard the judges with suspicion; (d) acknowledge by a bow or the wave of a hand all applause that comes from the spectators.

SECTION THREE—Q 1—The phrase "give him the gate," means (a) put up a strong argument; (b) throw him out; (c) give him applause; (d) pay him what is coming to him.

Q 2—Hoofer means (a) hitch-hiker; (b) dancer; (c) shoe salesman; (d) a quarrelsome person.

Q 3—A century note is (a) a brief letter; (b) $100 bill; (c) letter from home; (d) an old piece of paper money.

Q 4—A skirt is (a) an unescorted married woman; (b) a slang way of referring to all women; (c) a female dancing partner; (d) a hoyden.

Q 5—"Throw a line" means (a) to talk glibly; (b) to give an exhibition dance; (c) to invite a strange girl to have a drink; (d) to borrow money.

Q 6—"Gimmick" means (a) a street peddler's lure; (b) slang for "give me"; (c) an article of clothing; (d) a theater ticket.

Q 7—"Stand-up" means (a) to accost a girl on the street; (b) to deliberately neglect to keep an appointment; (c) to hit a friend for a loan of money; (d) to kid a girl.

Q 8—"Crash the gate" means (a) to

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break down a gate; (b) to sneak into a party to which you are not invited; (c) to hit a man in the mouth; (d) to wait for a girl just outside her gate.

Q 9—"Pushover" means (a) to knock down a man; (b) a young woman who will flirt with anyone; (c) a countrified boy; (d) a strong, intoxicating drink.

Q 10—"Berries" is a slang term for (a) money; (b) soft drinks; (c) caps without visors; (d) a rash on the face.

SECTION FOUR—Here are ten statements each followed by the letters T and F meaning True or False. If the statement is true check T; if false check F.

Q 1—In dining in a private home never neglect to thank the waitress each time she serves you with food. T—F.

Q 2—In escorting a young woman down the aisle of a theater a man should always follow her. T—F.

Q 3—When a young lady is playing the piano for guests, and you are one of the guests, it is not bad form to engage in conversation with one of the audience. T—F.

Q 4—When a visiting football team arrives at the athletic field they should be quartered in any spare room in the gym while the home team retains the best quarters. T—F.

Q 5—When ladies visit the camp and are at the dinner table, and you are seated between them, you should first pass the food to them. T—F.

Q 6—A young man, upon being introduced to a young woman who is seated, should not speak until she has arisen and offers him her hand. T—F.

Q 7—When wearing gloves you need not remove them to shake hands with another. Merely ask to be excused for wearing the gloves. T—F.

Q 8—In a crowded trolley car, a woman who appears to be more than 45 years old and is able-bodied should never be offered a seat by the young man who occupies it. T—F.

Q 9—Upon entering a room where a group of young people are quietly conversing among themselves it is correct for a young man to give life and spirit to the occasion by bursting into speech and keeping it up. T—F.

Q 10—It is correct when dining in a private home to speak in flattering terms of the food as you taste. T—F.

KEY ANSWERS—With the key answers before you go back through the questions and check on your answers, totaling your points for each section. The answers.

Section 1:

Q 1—(c)	Q 5—(b)	Q 9—(b)
Q 2—(c)	Q 6—(b)	Q 10—(b)
Q 3—(a)	Q 7—(a)	
Q 4—(b)	Q 8—(b)	Total points .....

Section 2:

Q 1—(a)	Q 6—(b)	
Q 2—(a)	Q 7—(c)	
Q 3—(b)	Q 8—(b)	
Q 4—(b)	Q 9—(c)	
Q 5—(c)	Q 10—(b)	Total Points.....

Section 3:

Q 1—(b)	Q 5—(a)	Q 9—(b)
Q 2—(b)	Q 6—(a)	Q 10—(a)
Q 3—(b)	Q 7—(b)	
Q 4—(b)	Q 8—(b)	Total Points.....

Section 4:

Q 1—F	Q 5—F	Q 9—F
Q 2—F	Q 6—F	Q 10—F
Q 3—F	Q 7—F	
Q 4—F	Q 8—F	Total Points.....

How to rate yourself. Frankly, this is a catch test. If you have made a score of 70 to 100 on the Section One test, you have failed; in fact the lower your score on this section the better. A total of zero in this test would be perfect. Obviously, the ten questions pertain to sporting events in which gambling is the chief attraction; hence the higher your score the more you know about the type of sports which are patronized by gamblers.

The opposite is true of Section Two. All these questions relate to the sports of healthier types, the sports parents desire their children to enjoy. To pass this test a minimum mark of 70 is required. If you passed Section One with, say, 90 points, and Section Two with only 50, the examiner will regard you as knowing too much about the gambling sports, too little about the sports approved for young people.

Likewise in the Section Three test, a high score indicates that you know too much about slang while a high score in Section Four indicates that you are familiar with correct social customs. A mark of

(*Continued on Page* 143)

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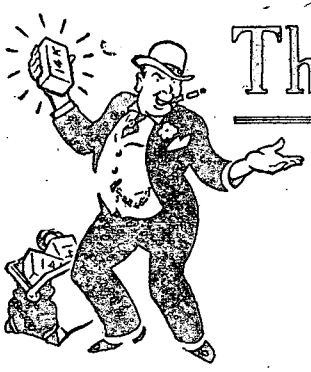

They're Swindling You!

"The Spanish Prisoner"—and Others

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the fiftieth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

THE grandfather of all rackets is on the loose again. When your father was a boy, no matter how old *you* are, *his* father probably received a letter written in a strangely foreign handwriting, in poor English, and postmarked, "Madrid, Spain."

That *was* an event. The letter told a harrowing tale of imprisonment, disclosed that the writer had a comfortable fortune cached, and he offered your grandfather one-third of this vast amount. It must have worked in some instances, although I must confess that in years of experience I have yet to hear, at first hand, of any person being hooked by this hoary old swindle.

All through the years since then, thousands upon thousands of "Spanish Prisoner" letters have been mailed to persons all over the world. Now the old scheme appears with a Mexican address. Tulsa, Oklahoma, citizens have recently received letters similar to the following:

DEAR SIR:

Being arrested here by bankruptcy, I beg your aid to recover a sum of $185,000 I have in America, being necessary to come here to raise the seizure of my baggage, paying to the registrar of the court the expense of my trial and recover my portmanteau containing a secret pocket where I have hidden several checks for that amount.

By reward, I offer you a third part, viz: $62,000.

Owing to my good conduct in prison, I have got a place like clerk in the office, thus I can write you in this manner, avoiding at the same time, you may know, my writing, to your answer.

I cannot receive your answer at prison, but if you will please send a telegram to a person of my confidence who will deliver it to me.

Awaiting your answer to entrust you all my secrets. Yours truly,

A. . .

The most discretion is wanted. Don't answer by letter; only by telegraph as following: Santos Marques, Uruguay No. 12, (Hotel) Mexico, D. F.

If, and when you reply, you are asked to advance a certain sum of

"I am glad to endorse the program of *Detective Fiction Weekly* which will bring to its readers the truth about rackets and racketeers. No man can be swindled if he knows in advance what the swindler is going to do—and nobody *wants* to be swindled."—Edward L. Greene, General Manager of the National Better Business Bureau.

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money which, of course, you never see again. This is supposed to cover the expense of bribing prison officials in order to effect the release of the imaginary prisoner. If you begin to see the light after your money is gone and threaten to take the matter up with the authorities, you will be reminded that you were party to a plot to bribe government officials. All "Spanish Prisoner" letters should immediately be forwarded to the Inspector in Charge, Post Office Department, Washington, D. C.

ALONG the Mexican border, they still tell many tales of that marauding old bandit, Francisco Villa, who pillaged Mexico during the Revolution about twenty years ago under the guise of a patriot. Gold mines, because they were easy of access, poorly defended, and generally contained a supply of the precious yellow metal which Villa needed badly, were raided time and again.

They still maintain, down there, that Villa established a cache in the mountains in the Arizpe district of Sonora near the El Tigre Mine, and that much of the bullion he stole was secreted there. Villa is gone, but the legend remains—to be the basis of other frauds.

Men who claim to have been confidants of the bandit approach Americans with the story that they know the location of this vast hoard of gold. All that is necessary is for the Americans to advance them enough money to enable them to hire Indians to transport the gold from the mountain hideout and into the United States, where it can be sold for thirty-five dollars an ounce.

Many "rich Americans" have beeen so impressed with this plausible story that they *have* financed the story tellers, who, of course, disappear in the mountains with their Indian caravan never to appear again—except to other "rich Americans."

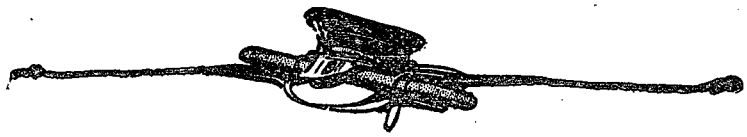
That is one story. Another yarn refers to a miraculously rich "Mountain of Gold" which is supposed to exist in the almost inaccessible Mexican interior. Again, if the rich Americans will only provide the necessary money for transportation, pure gold by the ton will be their reward.

This is another myth. That they do carry weight with a certain class of Americans—and educated Americans, too—is attested by a story which appeared only a few months ago on the front pages of nearly every newspaper in the country. This recorded the suicide of a well-known, but not very rich American, under very mysterious circumstances.

When the facts came to light, it was learned that his life savings had been invested in one of these Mexican mirages. *That* story wasn't published, except in a very few newspapers. It isn't news when a man makes a sucker of himself.

These slick Mexican promoters of rich Americans almost fit the formula which runs: "A promoter is a man who tries to sell nothing for something to people who are looking for something for nothing."

Next Week—Jumping Jehosaphat!



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Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

OUR *Cipher Correspondence Club* is growing right along! Herewith is the latest page for the Club Directory, together with some changes of address, to keep the list up-to-date. The purpose of this departmental organization is to put you in contact with others who are interested in ciphers, methods of solution, etc. If you are not already a member, send us *your* name and address for publication. Membership is free. And write to these new members. They'll be glad to hear from you!

CIPHER CORRESPONDENCE CLUB

(Continued from August 8, 1936)

RENGAW, Franz R. Wagner, 1445 Plaisance Court, Chicago, Ill.

JUSTA SMITH, Mrs. C. S. Smith, 617 W. 141st., New York, N. Y.

Helen P. Foote, Elizabethtown, Ky.

BUGLER, Claude T. Foote, Elizabethtown, Ky.

DANTE, Elwood B. Yeager, 546 Gordon St., Reading, Pa.

(To Be Continued)

Please note the following new addresses: ROMEO, John C. Moore, *former address,* 306 W. Main St., Waynesboro, Pa.; *new address,* 27 E. Main St., Waynesboro, Pa. Elvin Crane Paynter, *former address,* R. F. D. No. 2, Millville, N. J.; *new address,* 2204 Asbury Ave., Ocean City, N. J. DOGMAAMGOD, Charles E. Bender, *former address,* P. O. Box 225, Massillon, Ohio; *new address,* R. F. D. No. 3, Massillon, Ohio. Members are requested to promptly report all changes of address.

G. Fulton's "Stonehenge," last week's Inner Circle cipher No. 222, yielded through vowel identification, trying as vowels those symbols occurring in both second and third positions, with due attention to vowel digrams. NVZA LVZN (*eo- - -o-e*) would thus follow as *eons gone;* etc. IEVZ (frequencies 6-3-10-9), guessed as *upon,* would also provide entry to the same two words.

Leading off this week's puzzles, Gene Miller's division uses a 10-letter key-word, numbered from *0* to *9*. Symbol L can be limited to two values, duly noting LSO and its products. In Captain Kidd's contribution, compare Z, GRZG, GRU, and GN, following up with YS and the phrase YG YH; and so to the longer groups UXUPGYNSH and NLLYPYZX.

Numerous short words afford ingress to Zapolya's cryptogram. Note DUH and UH; FVT after a comma; PV and the phrase AHVD TPAV; PBD and the phrase BL BLPV; and so on. Gitano's message presents some attractive patterns —for instance, look at that 11-letter eleventh word! The endings -GLK and -OGRL will help with LROYOGRL.

In H. F. Wickner's alliterative construction, note the high frequencies of symbols A, D, X, and V in connection with AXDAVXDJ. Spot your own clues in Wally's Inner Circle production. A solution of No. 228 and the answers to all of this week's ciphers will be published next week. The asterisks in cryptograms indicate capitalization.

No. 223—Cryptic Division. By Gene Miller.

```
L S O ) C O B N L ( A C T
C L K
-------
  S T N
  K O L
-------
    E O L
    E K A
-------
      A E
```


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No. 224—Special Bulletin. By Captain Kidd.

YG YH NSXB LZYK GN ZOFYHU FNGUKH YS GRU LZXX UXUPGYNSH GRZG Z "VZBNK" YH Z PYGB NLLYPYZX, ERYXU Z "VZKU" YH Z LUVZXU RNKHU. ONS'G TUG GRUV VYDUO!

No. 225—The North Wind Blows. By Zapolya.

"DUH GBV RFXH BL BLPV DUH YHED, PBD PE DUH GHF RFXH UH! FVT UH GUPVH OKNSUD, FVT PV DUH KNSUD AHVD TPAV NVDP DUH GHF."—*RPYHKNTSH.

No. 226—Peremptory Command. By Gitano.

ZYXVZ *TSRPT ONXYLO, KRYHGLK SPTFS DXDFGOD, HDFYLHDH NYFFDXN URRU EGOZHXYE YUXYAYHYUXY LROYOGRL. PRNYP XTLLDX VTUVOGOTODH AYLRLGA FDFRXYLHTF.

No. 227—Economical Entertainment. By H. F. Wickner.

AZBYCXDWECD *AVXVFUCGY ACXTDHW AVXYZBCSVXSH AVSVYVISD, ASDGYZRCS AXUTDGJDX, ADXRDBYSH AXDAVXDJ. AVXVJUQZB AKDGUFDGUG: AUACSVX AXZBDW AXDTVZS.

No. 228—A Dignified Duck. By Wally.

ALELUPH GOLPUS XRADPEHA VEALUSPH EKRPRLH; EMYRXA XUNOTFL FYXNRAB NPOTK DUS FBRUN ZRLFBUT-VERX, QRPX, NPEVGYHETL FSUELOSU.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

217—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
A R T I C H O K E S

218—The launching of a tiny plane from the back of a larger aircraft is a late development in aviation. More and better inventions!

219—Avoid those hot months! Come to Aroostook County, "home of good potatoes," for cool woodland brooks, moonlit pools, also modern hotels.

220—Crooked lawyer defends suspicious character seized with smuggled jewelry. Fixed witnesses, fabricated evidence, corrupt jury, secure acquittal. Crime "pays"!

221—"FF" tiff: Biff! Stiff affray! Officer Jeff cuffs huffy riffraff off gruff, daffy gaffer. Bluff sheriff offers tiffin, fluffy taffy, coffee.

222—Huge ruin, rock naos, epic stoa, form mute sign cast down dark eons gone; harp only soul left upon trek amid vast star dust ages.

Answers to any of this week's ciphers will be credited to the solver in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for September. Address: M. E. Ohaver, Detective Fiction Weekly, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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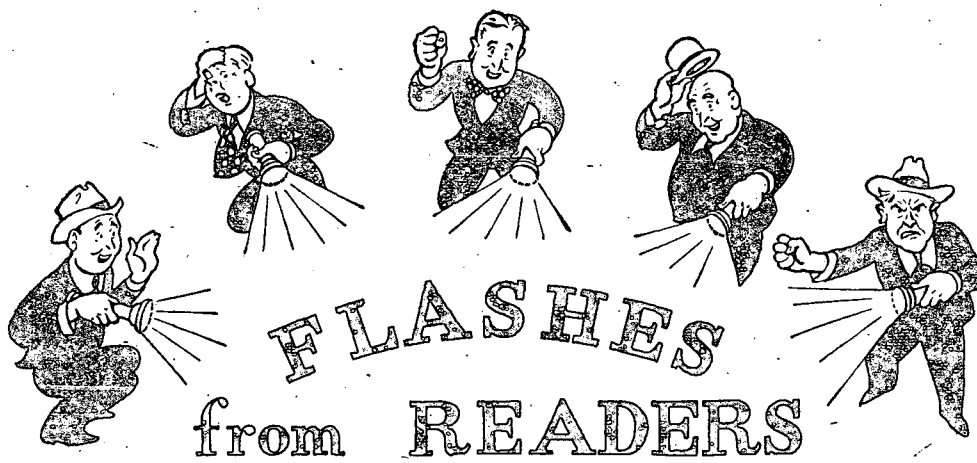

A NUMBER of weeks have passed now since we asked readers for their opinion of the story, "The Night I Died," in the August 8 issue. The response to that request was spectacular—a flood of letters. Some wrote in that the story was one of the finest we have ever published. Others went to the other extreme. One thing is clear, however, and that is that most readers *did* enjoy it. A proof of this is the fact that they are still writing in.

This letter comes from the nation's capital.

DEAR SIR:

I have been a reader of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY ever since the first number of FLYNN'S made its appearance. That is, with the exception of a few months, when, for some reason or other, feeling satiated with magazine reading, I discontinued all magazines of every description for a time. Now I only take two magazines regularly, and DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is one of them.

I consider your magazine the best one of its kind, and I certainly like your plan of only one serial at a time, and not permitting the serials to overlap each other. In my opinion, it is the best policy ever adopted by any magazine. Your plan has been a special help to me, as it has been my practice to send the magazines, after I have finished with them, to an invalid friend, who is unable to purchase them for himself. Because of this admirable plan of yours, regarding the serials, I am able to send my friend, from time, a bundle of D.F.W., with every story complete, including the serial. It is a very satisfactory arrangement for all concerned.

I like the true stories you publish, and hope you will keep them up. Many of them I can well remember. And they go to show the truth of that old adage, "Truth is stranger than fiction." Of the fiction you publish, I like the *Riordan* and *Calhoun* stories the best. If there is any for which I do not care, it is *The Lady from Hell.*

The story, "The Night I Died," is very interesting, as it gives the reaction and mentality of a man who suddenly plunges into crime. Edgar Allan Poe wrote a number of tales along the same lines. The story is too tragic to laugh over, but it is not pathetic enough to cause one to weep. But it contains much food for thought, is very interesting, and the moral is, on the whole, good. By all means give us more of them, but not too many of them.

In conclusion, I wish to say one thing more regarding your excellent magazine. I find the department, SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS, very interesting and very fascinating. I am inclined to think that Mr. Ohaver's excellent department has been the main cause of my being a continuous reader of D.F.W. I find great pleasure and recreation in solving the cryptograms.

Yours sincerely,

HUGH B. ROSSELL,
Washington, D. C.

An attorney gives us his viewpoint.

DEAR SIR:

I have been reading DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY ever since the good old days when it was known as FLYNN'S. I take a great many magazines and in addition am a partially successful amateur writer; and, in my opinion, this maga-

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zine is the finest publication. Every issue contains one or two true stories. In that way you do not get satiated, like you do in reading many of the blood-and-thunder true detective stories.

In regard to the controversy about the serials: I personally like one or two serials, as they keep an interest in your mind carrying from week to week. Practically speaking, I like all the short stories. The August 8th issue contains what is known as an off-trail story, entitled "The Night I Died." As a criminal defense lawyer, it was very interesting to me and clearly shows how the human mind can make sudden changes from the humdrum every day life, to that of a serious crime.

I believe that an unusual story like "The Night I Died," being so radically different from the rest of your magazine, is a big asset; however, you will probably find it impossible to secure enough of that type of story to publish one each week week.

Anyway, taking our magazine all in all, it cannot be beat. Those articles by Frank Wrentmore are saving the American public hundreds of dollars.

Sincerely yours,
MAX COLEMAN,
Lubbock, Texas.

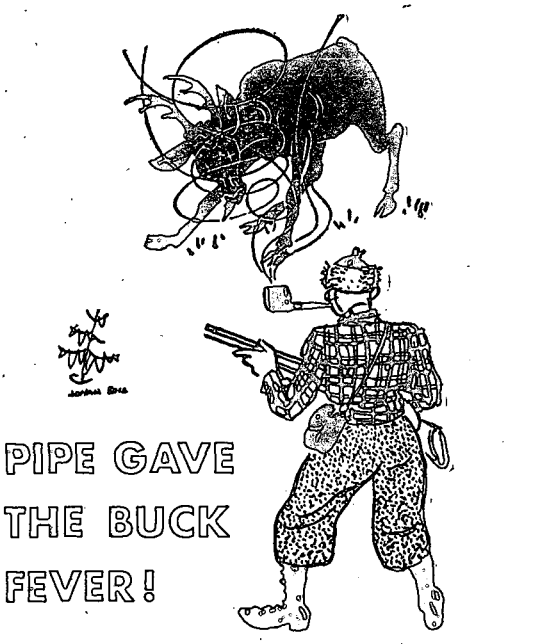
Civil Service Q & A

(*Continued from Page 137*)

100 in the Section Three test and 40 in the Section Four test indicates a perfect knowledge of slang and street customs but a woefully deficient knowledge of social etiquette. Thus, a candidate who makes a final score of 0 in Section One and Three and 100 in Sections Two and Four is said to have the highest qualifications. Remember that the want ad specified "young men and women of . . . good character . . . they must speak good English, be well-informed, refined and cultured and above all things must be qualified to set good examples for the children under their care as to everyday living, sports and etiquette, yet they must be well posted on the affairs of life."

The test has been criticised as unfair to the men and women of excellent character and education who have read much and in that way gained a knowedge of slang and gambling though they do not indulge in either. However, that may be, the test is approved by psychologists and the test-maker rather than the test-taker has the last word.

Next Week—
Most Likely Police Questions



BOYS, we see no sport in gassing deer with a gooey old pipe filled with garlicy tobacco. But we see a lot of pleasure in a well-kept briar packed with a gentle, fragrant blend like Sir Walter Raleigh. We've put a lifetime into mixing this rare combination of well-aged Kentucky Burleys that wouldn't nip a baby's tongue or a doe's nose. Sir Walter's got a delightful aroma all its own. Buck up and join the happy herd of Sir Walter Raleigh smokers. You'll have the world eating out of your hand! (Full tin, with heavy gold-foil wrap for freshness, at the unbelievably low price of 15¢.)

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Murder in the Middle of New York

A Thrilling Crime Novelette

By Cornell Woolrich

TONY SHUCRUE didn't want to be a gangster, yet love for *Lucy* made him chauffeur a mob leader. He didn't want bloody money, but bloody money from the chief's own pocket had paid for the ring and license and had set him and *Lucy* up in their own little apartment. And it's funny how it works out sometimes—funny the way manhood shows. For that same love, and an undying strain of rash honesty, forced *Tony* to gamble both their lives in a perilous, forlorn attempt to thwart the mob!

○

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"CIVIL SERVICE Q & A," by "G-2"
"SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS," by M. E. OHAVER

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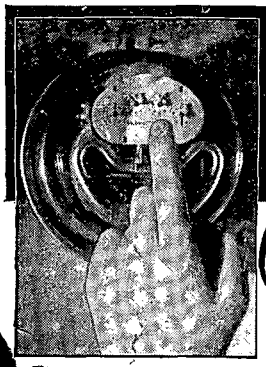

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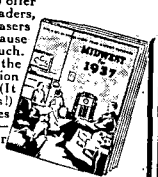

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